the weekly
Standard

DECEMBER 1, 2008 $4.95

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CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

Who are the Guantánamo detainees?

THOMAS JOSCELYN

Camp X-Ray, the first detention facility to hold enemy combatants at the U.S. Naval Station at Guantánamo Bay

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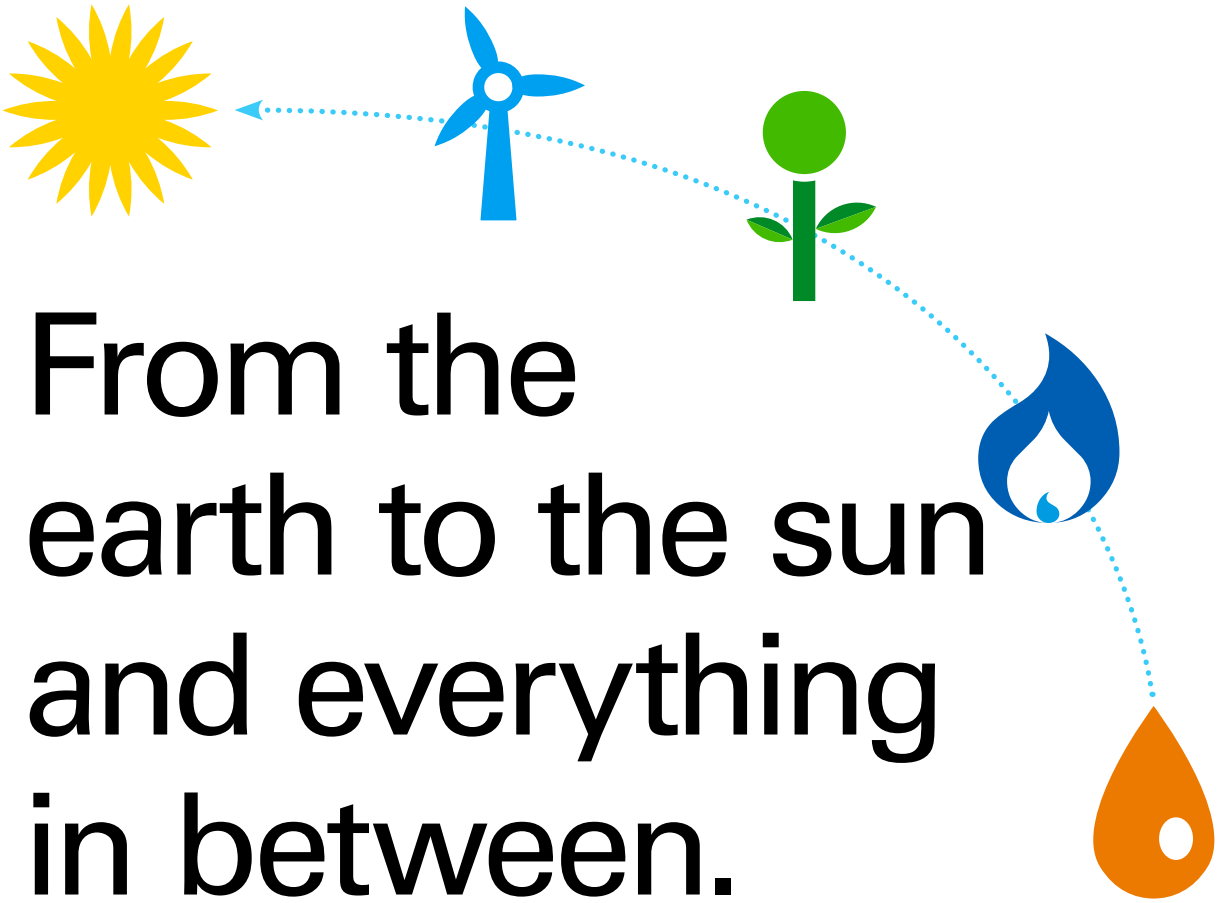

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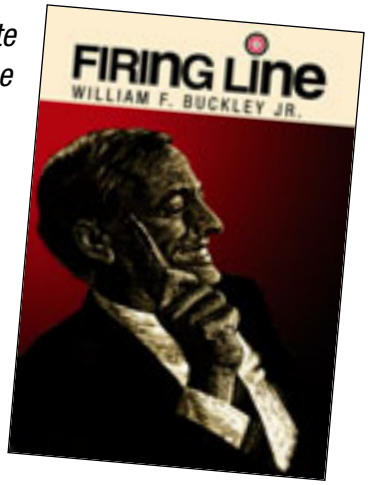

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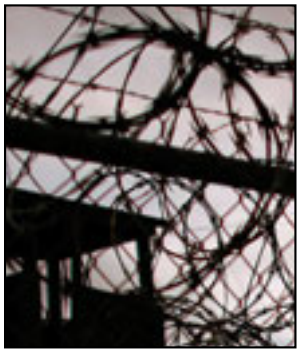

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Puff, Puff, Puff

The Scrapbook has always treasured the story that President William McKinley was contentedly puffing on his cigar in the White House one afternoon when a photographer arrived to take his picture. McKinley instinctively hid the stogie from view, remarking that "the young men of this country must not see their president smoking!"

It might well be an apocryphal tale, but it does sum up two pertinent facts about the modern presidency: Our chief executives are human beings, with human foibles; and presidents feel obliged, in their personal conduct, to set a good example. This latter feature is sometimes observed in the breach (see John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton), and presidents who lead blameless private lives are not always impeccable about their official duties (see Richard Nixon).

With one notable exception, however, our presidents who happen to be smokers have generally felt obliged to conceal their habit from public view. And as smoking loses what little social sanction it ever had, pressures on puffing presidents have grown correspondingly strong.

In fact, we have not had many presidents who were nicotine fiends—which is not surprising, given the Herculean degree of self-discipline required to win the presidency. Dwight D. Eisenhower had been an umpteen-pack-a-day man in the Army, but had quit cigarettes before entering the White House. The aforementioned Kennedy liked to smoke an occasional cigar in private—Clinton put cigars to a variety of uses—and Gerald Ford occasionally chewed on a pipe. The great exception, of course, was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who not only publicly consumed unfiltered Camels—not a great idea for a man with cardiac problems—but was often photographed smoking them with the assistance of a cigarette holder. In this, as in many other aspects of his presidency, there was only one FDR.

Which brings us to the interesting fact that President-elect Barack Obama is a cigarette smoker, too. We know this because he admitted as much during the primary campaign and, like many smokers, pledged to quit at some unspecified point in the future. The evidence is persuasive that the point has not yet been reached.

On this matter The Scrapbook declares its official disinterest. Except for the well-known, and deadly serious, health risk inherent in smoking, which theoretically puts the republic in some elevated danger of a Biden presidency, The Scrapbook believes that Barack Obama's appetite for cancer sticks—coffin nails, weeds, snouts, fags, jacks, etc.—is a matter best left between Obama and his conscience, or perhaps Mrs. Obama. If tapping a cigarette out of the package, rapping it once or twice on his desktop, closing the cover before striking and scraping a match against the phosphorus, torching the business end of the weed, and inhaling a long, slow, sensual cloud of smoke into the presidential lungs—if that is Barack Obama's idea of change we can believe in, then more power to him.

But the White House is a public place—a government facility, lest we forget, subject to federal rules and regulations—and recent Democratic presidents have been inclined to contract, rather than expand, the right of citizens to drink (Carter) or smoke (Clinton) on the premises. Which leads The Scrapbook to the law of unintended consequences, and the spectacle of President Obama slipping out of the Oval Office into the cold, wet Washington weather and furtively lighting up, puffing away underneath the Truman Balcony or in the West Wing driveway.

As William McKinley might say, the young men of this country must not see their president forced to sneak a cigarette on the White House grounds! ♦

Another BBC Crank

The Scrapbook has been following the career of Gore Vidal, the historical novelist, gay polemicist, and full-time raconteur, with pleasure for many years. It's a perverse pleasure, we concede, but a pleasure nonetheless—whether savoring the details of his unsuccessful 1960 congressional campaign in New York (conducted under a pseudonym), his 1982 Senate campaign in California as nominee of, yes, the People's party, or his extended correspondence with soulmate Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber.

Delusional, anti-Semitic, rigidly isolationist, endlessly embroidering his and his family's history, Gore Vidal might be described as the house intellectual of the Loony Left. Not bad for a fellow armed with a high school diploma.

And yet, behind the sneering tone, reflexive rage, and sweating envy (Ronald Reagan was "a triumph of the embalmer's art"), Vidal has always faithfully performed his role as the village crank. This is nowhere more evident than in his recent election night appearance on BBC television—you can find it, with minimal effort, on YouTube—where his admiring interlocutor David Dimbleby is subject to Vidal's trademark rudeness ("If you'll let me talk"), reflexive contempt ("I

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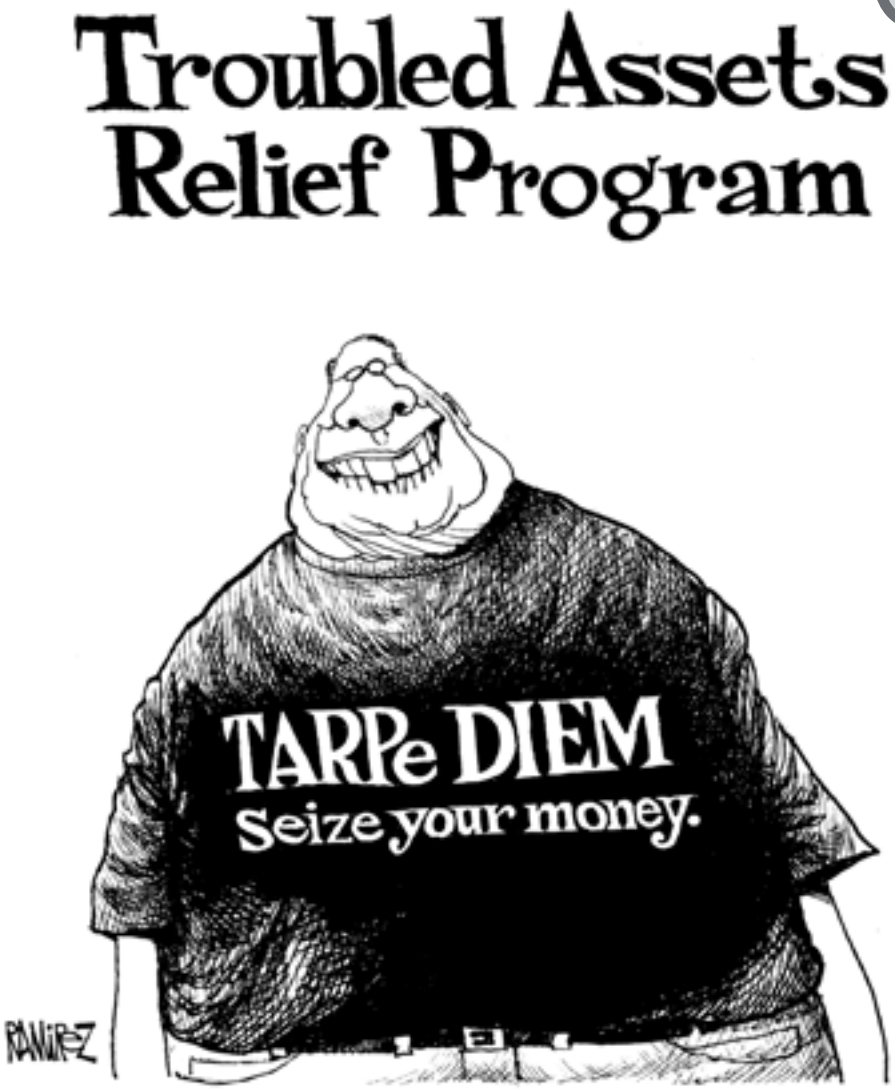

don't know why you would because I don't know who you are"), and unique historical perspective (he anticipates a violent Republican "eruption" over Barack Obama's victory).

THE SCRAPBOOK's interest was piqued, however, by Vidal's allusion—now a standard occurrence—during the interview to his maternal grandfather, Sen. Thomas Gore (1870-1949) of Oklahoma. Since Senator Gore left the Senate as long ago as 1937, and Vidal's audiences are customarily worshipful, he has managed to create a largely fictional, almost touchingly idealized, version of his grandfather's mediocre career.

The BBC audience got the full treatment—Vidal's grandfather was "the most powerful senator of the day . . . president of the Senate"—when, in truth, Thomas Gore was never at any time president of the Senate (that's the vice president, by the way) or "powerful" in the least, and probably best known to the public for the fact that he was blind. Far from "powerful," in fact, Gore was twice defeated for reelection in Democratic primaries, alienated Woodrow Wilson with his violent opposition to American entry into World War I, and (reelected to a single term in the early 1930s) feuded incessantly with Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Irascible, incoherent, isolationist, deeply misanthropic, politically impotent, passionately in love with the sound of his voice—like grandfather, like grandson, THE SCRAPBOOK might say. ♦

Yo Ho Ho and a Bottle of Rum

Three cheers for the Indian Navy, which on November 18 sank a pirate mothership in the Gulf of Aden and now intends to build on that success by deploying at least one more warship to the area.

Piracy is on the rise, as dramatically evidenced by the capture of the Saudi oil tanker *Sirius Star* last week. The marauders find safe haven along the lawless coast of Somalia, from which they launch attacks on the more than 20,000 ships traversing the region each year. The attacks disrupt international trade at a perilous moment for the global economy.

We wish we could say that the U.S. Navy had tackled the problem, but so far our government's response has been feckless. At a briefing at the Pentagon last week, Defense Department spokesman Geoff Morrell urged private companies to hire armed guards and escorts for protection. That's fine advice, but it misses the point. One of the public goods that the United States has provided the world for the last half century has been secure sea lanes. And of course our tradition of taking a leading role on this issue dates back to the Marines' landing on "the shores of Tripoli" during the war on the Barbary Pirates under President Thomas Jefferson. Why not adopt the same forward-leaning approach to piracy that has protected America for eight years against terrorist attacks? We know where the pirates live. Time to make them walk the plank. ♦

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Casual

Days of Wine and Oysters

Every year just before Thanksgiving, the Old Ebbitt Grill in Washington holds an "oyster riot"—an event featuring a live band, copious amounts of wine, and a limitless supply of oysters (at last year's riot, 50,000 oysters were devoured in two days). Customers pay $115 a head and many dress up for the sold-out occasion. Needless to say, the right choice of wine to accompany the briny bivalves is crucial. Experts recommend a cold, crisp white with minerality and a clean finish—nothing too buttery or oaky. So prior to each riot, the restaurant conducts a wine and oyster pairing competition, in which 14 judges select the 10 wines that pair best with the oysters. This year, I was one of those judges.

Though thrilled to receive such an honor, I wondered if I was up to the task. The restaurant's head of marketing assured me the only requirement is a love for oysters and wine. But what if, drawing on my oenological ignorance, I said something stupid? Or even worse, suppose my favorite wines turned out to be of the box or screw-top variety? The competition involves 20 numbered glasses and all the Olympia oysters you can handle. What happens if by glass 20 everything is a blur?

In *Judgment of Paris*, George M. Taber describes the moment when winemaker Warren Winiarski tasted a year-old Nathan Fay Cabernet Sauvignon: "The wine had a complex, layered structure that provided a progression of flavors as the wine moved across his taste buds. It didn't pass through his mouth smoothly like silk. It was more like linen, with an extremely fine-grained texture of intertwined tastes that could be savored and enjoyed slowly. The aftertaste was excellent—long and lingering." I've never even tasted linen.

But when I explained my plight to a few wine friends, they were nothing but encouraging. Lyn Farmer, a food and wine critic in Miami, told me not to sweat it: "Odds are, if *you* like it, *they*'ll like it. Too many professionals are preoccupied with finding faults in wine instead of finding what's enjoyable." In the end, said Farmer, "trust your palate." Pamela Busch, the proprietor and wine director of Cav Wine Bar and Kitchen in San Francisco, reminded me "that lighter wines that are tasted after bigger or more tannic wines will not show that well. Drink water in between to get the taste of the last wine out of your mouth. . . . Also, try not to judge based just on what you like but what you think is a well-made wine."

HAL MAYFORTH

So with all that in mind, I judged. In a private room in the Old Ebbitt's basement, sitting around a long table covered in linen (no, I was not tempted to taste it), we judges kept mostly to ourselves lest we influence each other. The only sounds heard were the clinking of glasses, an occasional whisper, and wine being slurped—and sometimes spat into buckets. Then, one by one, the judges finalized their rankings and went back upstairs to a private reception. At one point I looked up and noticed there were just four of us left. One of the other three was a real judge: Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia.

Justice Scalia took his job seriously. He would take a sip, close his eyes in deep concentration, then jot something down. He asked the highly attentive waiters to bring several more glasses of wines for further examination. Exhaling loudly, the justice broke the silence in the room and said, "This is a really tough decision."

Eventually I ranked my top ten and joined the other judges to feast on shrimp, crabcakes, prime rib, and even more oysters. (The legendary gastronome Brillat-Savarin wrote that humans were capable of ingesting 144 oysters in a sitting. I stopped at 45.) After everyone's scores were tallied and combined, the results were made public: My personal favorite was ranked an abysmal 13th. But other than that, I didn't do too badly: The overall winner, a Saint Clair "Vicar's Choice" Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough, New Zealand, was my sixth favorite. (Ultimately, 7 of our 10 came from New Zealand.) The second best was my fourth. And the overall least favorite was also toward the bottom of my list.

At the bar, I turned to Scalia and asked which wine he most enjoyed. "I don't remember," he replied. "My problem with wine is I always taste apples." Fair enough. The justice then sat with a few of us at a table where we talked about the election, food, hunting, and just about everything else. At some point in the night the justice might have even told me who he thought was going to step down from the Supreme Court. But by then it was all a blur.

Victorino Matus

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Assessing Porter

There we were in the height of our silly season, the presidential elections, and you found space for a gem of an essay on Katherine Anne Porter ("Pale Horse, Pale Writer," October 27). Brooke Allen knows her subject and sums it up beautifully. Porter's childhood memories in Texas, the loss of her mother when young, the "feckless" father—all of these things weigh heavily in her best work. Allen has a fine narrative sense and weaves it all together: Porter's later incarnation as a grand dame, literary-wise; her dwindling fame nowadays; the two biographies and other critical comments.

I would quibble with one point. Wonderful stories—but could she write a novel? Perhaps *Ship of Fools* can best be thought of as a series of related short stories, sketches of people as they reveal themselves on the slow passage of a ship to Europe, to Germany in particular. Did Porter find the one vehicle that would suffice, both as a longer work and as a testament of her ability to tell a story in as few words as possible? She does portray, unflaggingly, her doleful view of human nature.

My hat's off to Brooke Allen! (I know Porter's childhood haunts well, those rolling, black-soiled and fruitful lands between Austin and San Antonio; I am sorry to hear they are now blanketed with shopping centers and malls.)

James Allensworth
Arcata, Calif.

Life and Art

The subheadline of Joseph Bottum's "Sir Vidia's Dance" (November 17) asks, "Can life and art be separated?"

Of course they can. François Villon's stature as a great poet is not affected by his having been a highwayman and murderer; Caravaggio's reputation as a painter is not changed by his violent life and commission of manslaughter; nor is Richard Wagner's stature as one of the greatest composers affected by his egregious anti-Semitism and personal rottenness in general. The question is a nonstarter. If anything, these reputations are enhanced by their subjects' villainous natures, as Bottum suggests is possible when he muses on V.S. Naipaul's motives for letting the world know all about his vicious personality. In any case, it doesn't matter. Whether we like it or not, art and life are separate.

Charles Zigmund
Ossining, N.Y.

Shiva Naipaul, the author of *Fireflies* (1970), *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* (1973), and *North of South* (1978) is the Naipaul worth reading, not V.S. Unfortunately in 1985, at the age of 40, the man whom the *Daily Telegraph* called "one of the most talented and wide-ranging writers of his generation," died suddenly of thrombosis. If Shiva had lived, he would have long overshadowed his older brother, and we should have been spared the tiresome avowals of whoring and wife beating, which Mr. Bottum justly deplores in *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V.S. Naipaul.*

Edward Short
New York, N.Y.

Masculine Fiction

Mary Grabar's "Boyz n the Book" (October 27, 2008) only touched on part of the reason I still read comic books. Not only does most modern high-brow fiction ignore or disparage "masculine stereotypes of tests of strength, intelligence, and bravery" while superheroes are tested on all three virtues, but there is another masculine test known from mythology as "the choice of Hercules": whether to pursue pleasure or virtue, whether or not to sacrifice yourself in order to be a hero.

Comic books seem to be the only place where this contest is still taken seriously.

Don Schenk
Allentown, Pa.

The Rights of Man

Thanks for "R-e-s-p-e-c-t" by Robert F. Nagel (October 13). It was well-written, informative, valid, and valuable.

What Nagel did not say—yea, is never said—is that there is no constitutional or natural right of same-sex marriage. Perhaps this is a blunt statement, but it is true nonetheless.

The Founders established the U.S. Constitution in part to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." The "blessings of liberty" are the "unalienable rights" with which all men are "endowed by their Creator" as stated in the Declaration of Independence.

The Founders framed the Constitution to secure only unalienable rights: "[T]o secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among men."

A union between two members of the same sex was not, is not, and never will be an unalienable, natural right! It cannot be so.

Furthermore, the statement in the California sample ballot for Proposition 8 was inaccurate. The initiative does not eliminate the "right of same-sex couples to marry" unless "right" is understood to mean a privilege granted by government.

Victor A. Sturgill
La Palma, Calif.

• • •

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The Sector Formerly Known as Private

We're beginning to get a sense of what the next four years will look like. It won't be a conservative era, that's for sure. Nor will it, despite appearances to the contrary, be a reprise of the Clinton era. Bill Clinton's version of economic liberalism meant slightly higher tax rates on income and capital, a slightly more burdensome regulatory apparatus, lower deficits, and a commitment to free trade. The public sector didn't meddle too much in the private sector. It was content, for the most part, to sit back and enjoy the tax revenue that the tech boom poured in.

Obama's liberalism will be different. The center of political gravity has moved to the left since the 1990s. The president-elect does not share his recent predecessors' enthusiasm for free trade. He also won't face a Republican Congress. Instead he'll be dealing with, and from time to time confronting, a Democratic Congress eager to enact a kilometers-long liberal wish list.

What's more, the global economy is entering a severe downturn. Tax receipts are going to plummet, which means the deficit will skyrocket. And the cash-strapped government isn't about to sit still. Earlier this year Washington spent $150 billion in economic stimulus. That seems to have had little effect, so there is considerable political pressure for—what else?—more stimulus. We will foot the bill.

There is no guarantee that this crisis will remain only economic. At home, an ineffective or incompetent government risks populist backlash. Abroad, prolonged recessions have a way of spilling over into the national security arena. In the 1990s, a global boom masked the harsh realities of a dangerous world. That's no longer the case.

Meanwhile, President-elect Obama will run a government that is heavily entangled in the formerly private sector. President Bush has already overseen the federal takeover of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac as well as the American International Group. The Federal Reserve has poured billions into the commercial paper and other debt markets. The federal government now owns shares of the nation's largest financial institutions. And with hundreds of billions yet to be spent, industry after industry is lining up at the trough.

Bush authorized these interventions in order to prevent a systemic collapse of global finance. Banks are the economy's circulatory system. They allow the marketplace to function. This is why Bush is reluctant to bail out the Detroit auto companies. In his view, such a bailout would interfere with the creative destruction natural to the marketplace.

But the Democrats see things differently. For them, TARP is a backdoor through which they can manage the economy in accordance with liberal nostrums. Senate Democrats like Christopher Dodd and Charles Schumer want to set compensation rates and loan criteria for the banks that have accepted federal money. They want to overrule the boards and shareholders who normally determine CEO salary and bonuses. They want to force financial institutions to lend to consumers who may not be able to repay the debt. This, even though loan defaults are what got us into trouble in the first place.

In January, when the heads of GM, Chrysler, and Ford return to Washington on their corporate jets, Democrats in Congress and President Obama will be more than happy to give them money. But, like the Godfather, the Democrats will ask Detroit for a favor in return. That favor may be boardroom seats, preferred stock, or strict regulations governing what type of cars Detroit can make, how they make them, and at what price they sell them. Instead of one CEO, GM will have as many as 535. Does anyone seriously believe that this will improve the company's fortunes?

Most of the interventions in the economy were meant to be short-term. But government programs have this nasty habit of confounding their designers' intentions. Rather than untangle the government from the housing, financial, and automobile sectors, Obama looks likely to strengthen the connection. He wants to do the same to the health care and energy industries. His labor allies look forward to the day when he signs legislation eliminating the secret ballot in union elections and insulating American companies from global competition. His green friends hold their tire-pressure gauges at the ready, waiting for Obama to regulate carbon dioxide as an air pollutant. And the tax collectors can't wait for 2010, when the Bush tax cuts expire and Democrats hike rates on high earners.

Whatever this is, it's neither conservative nor Clintonite. It really is a change from the last 25 years of public policy—a quarter century that happens to have seen the longest sustained economic expansion in history. The boom is over. And the new era does not bode well for American prosperity.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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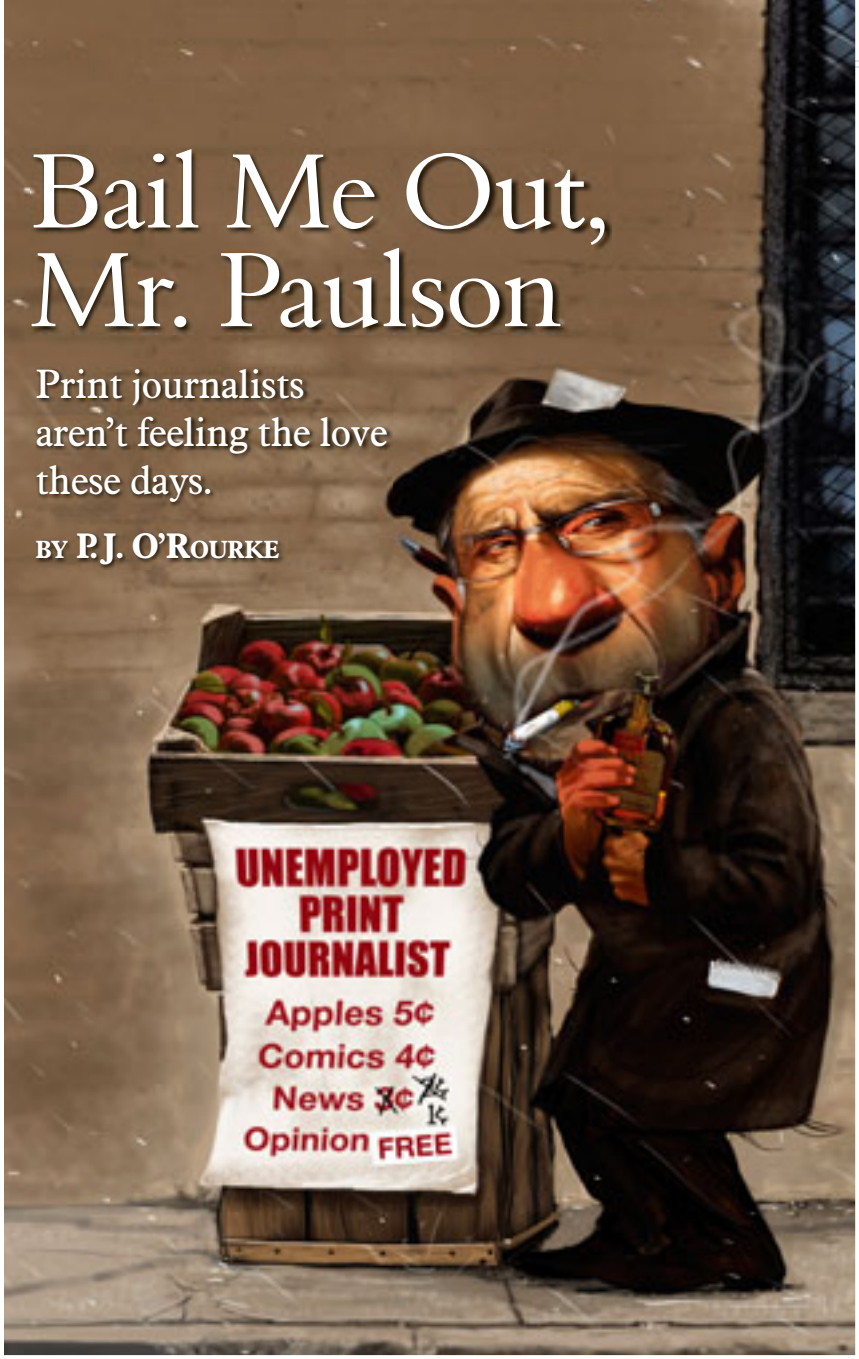
Bail Me Out, Mr. Paulson

Print journalists aren't feeling the love these days.

BY P.J. O'ROURKE



THOMAS FLUHARTY

Hello? Bailout people? Mr. Secretary of the Treasury Paulson? Aren't you forgetting somebody? Like me? I'm a print journalist. Talk about financial meltdown! Print journalists may soon have to send their kids to public schools, feed dry food to their cats, and give up their leases on Prius automobiles and get the Hummers that are being offered at such deep discounts these days.

The print journalism industry is taking a beating, circling the drain, running on fumes. Especially running on fumes. You could smell Frank Rich all the way to Nome when Sarah Palin was nominated. Not that print journalism actually emits much in the way of greenhouse gases. We have an itty-bitty carbon footprint. We're earth-friendly. The current press run of an average big city daily newspaper can be made from one tree. Compare that to the global warming hot air produced by talk radio, cable TV, and Andrew Sullivan.

There are many compelling reasons to save America's print journalism. And I'll think of some while the waiter brings me another drink. In the first place one out of three American households is dependent on print journalism[1]. And if you think home foreclosures are disruptive to American society, imagine what would happen if *USA Today* stopped publishing. Lose your home and you become homeless—a member of an important interest group with many respected advocates and a powerful political lobbying arm. But lose your newspaper and what are you going to do for covers on a cold night while you're sleeping on a park bench? Try blanketing yourself with Matt Drudge to keep warm.

The government is bailing out Wall Street for being evil and the car companies for being stupid. But print journalism brings you Paul Krugman *and* Anna Quindlen. Also, in 1898 Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal* started the Spanish-American War. All of the Lehman Brothers put together couldn't cause as much evil stupidity as that.

Moreover, rescuing print journalism is a "two-fer." Not only will America's principal source of Sudoku puzzles and Doonesbury be preserved but so will an endangered species—the hard-bitten, cynical, heavy-drinking news hound with a press card in his hatband, a cigarette stub dangling from his lip, and free ringside prize fight tickets tucked into his vest pocket. These guys don't reproduce in captivity. And there are hardly any of them left in the wild. I checked the bar. Just Mike Barnicle, as usual. How's tricks, Mike? Where'd everybody go? Sun's over the yardarm. Time to pour lunch.

We print journalists are victims of economic forces beyond our control. We were as surprised as everyone else was by the sudden collapse of the reliable reporting market. We had no idea that real news and clear-eyed analysis were being "bundled" with subprime celebrity gossip, *US Weekly* derivatives, and Jennifer Aniston/Angelina Jolie swaps. We need a swift infusion of federal aid. Otherwise all the information in America will be about Lindsay Lohan's sex life.

P.J. O'Rourke is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

[1]For house-breaking puppies

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Saving print journalism will be a bargain for the U.S. government. Nothing approaching $700 billion is required in our case. We'll settle for having the Treasury Department pay our tab at the Capital Grille. True, there is the danger that network television, with its much higher potential losses, will demand equal treatment. But this cannot be justified. Network television has been attempting to lure viewers for years with its low-interest programming only to have those viewers discover later that their brains are bankrupt.

Some taxpayers may object to a print journalism bailout on the grounds that it mostly benefits the liberal elite. And we can't blame taxpayers for being reluctant to subsidize the reportorial careers of J-school twerps who should have joined the Peace Corps and gone to Africa to "speak truth to power" to Robert Mugabe. Senators and congressmen may have their objections as well. They want first call on those twerps themselves. Twerps make excellent Hill staffers and can help elected officials angle for a cabinet post, such as Secretary of Hope and Change and Stuff, in the Obama administration. Obviously more twerps will be available if print journalism doesn't exist anymore. But I think we can ask America's legislators to make this sacrifice. (Memo to pols from an old hack, strictly on the q.t.—The J-school twerps don't smoke, don't drink, do yoga, and will tell DailyKos if you fool around.) And I think we can ask taxpayers whether they would prefer to pay journalists to harmlessly tickle keyboards at the *New Republic* or whether they would prefer to pay journalists to be in positions of influence on political policies that will wreck the taxpayers' lives.

Remember, America, you can't wrap a fish in satellite radio or line the bottom of your birdcage with MSNBC (however appropriate that would be). It's expensive to swat flies with a podcasting iPod. Newsboys tossing flat screen monitors onto your porch will damage the wicker furniture. And a dog that's trained to piddle on your high-speed Internet connection can cause a dangerous electrical short-circuit and burn down your house. ♦

A Time for Thanksgiving

Obama's debt of gratitude to George W. Bush.

BY JULES CRITTENDEN

As the transition progresses and Barack Obama's inauguration draws closer, it's a good moment to mull the gifts George W. Bush has left for the incoming president. Bush has made the world a better place, and if Obama wants to do the same, he will take the good things Bush has done and move forward with them.

Early indicators are in fact positive. In foreign policy, possibly embarrassed by the eagerness with which the world's most vile regimes have welcomed his election, Obama is backing off his many promises to sit down with dictators. His antiwar base is already outraged that he may not make closing the hated "Crusader gulag" at Guantánamo Bay his first act of national liberation from the Bush era. He is even reportedly considering allowing the CIA some leeway in interrogation techniques.

In the critical field of war and foreign policy, there are quite a few things for which President-elect Obama can thank George Bush.

First and foremost, Saddam Hussein—a state sponsor of terrorism, a producer of weapons of mass destruction, a warmonger, and a genocidal maniac—is gone. The threat he posed was a nagging concern to Bill Clinton, but Clinton, lacking the political will or perhaps a good excuse, was content to consider Saddam trapped in a box. George W. Bush didn't have that luxury. After the September 11 attacks the stakes were raised and Bush understood the world could not tolerate the presence of someone like Saddam, who defied all international challenges and was actively subverting the restraints upon him.

For the last five years, Saddam has been viewed, in retrospect, as having been harmless, but that is only because he was deposed and captured by forces acting on George Bush's orders, then tried and hanged by the Iraqi people. The Baathist regime is no more.

Thank you, George W. Bush.

That difficult task, which required the terrible resolve to send men to their deaths and also required several painful readjustments of strategy and tactics, was done in time so that Obama should be able to fulfill his campaign promise of getting out of Iraq and ramping up in Afghanistan.

It will be possible for Obama to draw down the U.S. troop presence in Iraq without a precipitous, premature withdrawal that could plunge the region into genocidal chaos and leave Iran the de facto regional power. Iraq is peaceful enough now that a policy fudge by Obama there—unlike on the Guantánamo issue—is something his liberal backers are unlikely to hold against him.

With minor policy adjustments that no one will notice, much less begrudge, he can stay past his 16-month deadline and continue to build Iraq as a beacon of democracy and a U.S. ally in the Middle East. Iraq's cabinet has approved a deal asking U.S. forces to stay until 2012, and Iraq's free parliament has been debating the matter in a highly spirited fashion—including fisticuffs—not unlike the early congressional proceedings of another nascent democracy.

Thank you, George W. Bush.

Jules Crittenden is an editor at the Boston Herald *and blogs at julescrittenden.com.*

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In the 1990s, anyone who told you Iraq would be a functioning, U.S.-allied democracy within a few short years would have been laughed out of the room. It has come at tremendous cost in both American and Iraqi lives. It is reasonable to assume, however, given the massive ethnic blood toll Saddam inflicted to maintain his regime, that establishing a Western-leaning Iraqi democracy has been accomplished with only a fraction of the violence that would have taken place absent U.S. intervention. Iran, while it meddles and wields deadly influence, has been kept at arm's length in the process, when Iran and Syria might both have been expected to descend on a post-Saddam Iraq. This highly dangerous region is stable—and has hope of remaining so.

The very concept of democracy in the region received a major boost when Arabs saw millions of Iraqis voting while under threat of death. This evolution is playing out in fits and starts in Lebanon and even the Palestinian territories, where voters have learned that the democratic process only *begins* with a vote. When Hamas chose to reward its backers with a bloodbath and international isolation, George Bush used that opportunity to draw an unprecedented gathering for former adversaries together to talk peace. Meanwhile, the very delicate Pakistan has advanced, with U.S. support, from military rule to elected civilian rule and remains an ally, if a problematic one, in America's war on Islamic extremism.

Thank you, George W. Bush.

George Bush has put a bow on his gift. The U.S. military's leading counterinsurgency warrior-philosopher, General David Petraeus, who resolved the initial mistakes of the Iraq occupation, now commands U.S. forces in the entire region, including Afghanistan. As some of the same voices that despaired in Iraq, declaring quagmires and demanding precipitous withdrawal, turn their despair to Afghanistan, Obama goes into battle without having to search for his Grant. He's already been found.

Thank you, George W. Bush.

The nuclear arms race in the Middle East was checked after 2003 when Iraq was cut out of it, Libya surrendered, and Iran momentarily halted its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Iran is back in the game, and apparently Syria as well, but Europe and the U.N. have come into line with George Bush on Iran, recognizing that ultimately someone must be willing to use force when all else fails. Bush has demonstrated to Obama that it is possible to negotiate from a position of strength with the international blessing that Obama craves.

Iran is perhaps the greatest challenge Obama will face. It requires him to be willing to take action on his own and not simply manage what was initiated by George Bush.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

NEWSCOM

Iran is perhaps the greatest challenge Obama will face. It requires him to be willing to take action on his own and not simply manage what was initiated by Bush. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Islamic Republic of Iran is one that threatens to upset the pro-democracy, pro-American balance of power Bush has painstakingly created.

There is one thing Bush did not do for Obama, a key bit of unfinished business in a midwar transition. Bush failed to increase the number of U.S. ground forces in the immediate post-9/11 period when Congress would have signed a blank check. As a result, Obama will become commander in chief of an overstressed military at a time when there is still more fighting to be done. To establish himself as a wartime president and show that he is serious about America's obligations and vital interests in the world, Obama, among his first acts as president, must make an effort to increase the size of the Army and the Marine Corps.

George W. Bush did not solve all the problems of the world's most troubled and dangerous region. But, for all his shortcomings, he has moved them forward and established the United States as the dominant agent for change in the Middle East. Consider the mess Obama would be inheriting in the region if the Bush administration had just sat on its thumbs—Ahmadinejad's Iran with an even further advanced nuclear arms program, an aging Saddam installing one of his psychopathic sons in power or Iraq being torn apart in a genocidal nightmare. Imagine all the regimes of the region, unchastened and unimpressed by the U.S. exercise of power, looking for any weakness or advantage to exploit and quite possibly finding it in al Qaeda and its affiliates.

Bush has set conditions that could allow Obama, if he abandons the desire to be liked as the underlying principle of his foreign policy and sticks to the path the Bush administration has laid out, to preside over the greatest blossoming of liberal democracy and stability the Middle East has ever seen, and in all likelihood, to get the credit for it.

For all of this, Barack Obama owes George W. Bush a tremendous debt of gratitude. ♦

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Twin Cities Throwdown

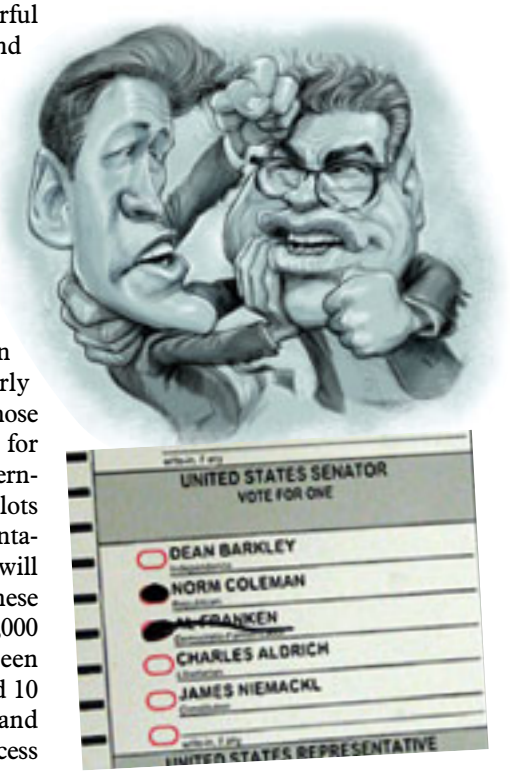
The Coleman-Franken recount may end up like a replay of Florida 2000. BY JOHN MCCORMACK

St. Paul, Minn.

Last Wednesday, campaign volunteers for Democratic candidate and comedian Al Franken were huddled outside of the Ramsey County office building. They had just finished their first day monitoring the recount in the Senate race between Republican senator Norm Coleman and Franken. "This isn't Florida!" a cheerful Frankenite chimed in toward the end of the rap session, eliciting a few laughs from her comrades standing outside in the freezing weather.

Throughout the day, eight election judges, each flanked by a Coleman and a Franken representative, sorted white paper ballots that look like standardized test sheets with a blank oval next to each candidate's name. In one pile, they placed votes clearly marked for Franken. In another, those clearly for Coleman. A third was for other Senate candidates or no discernible vote, and a fourth was for ballots challenged by a campaign representative. (The state's canvassing board will determine who, if anyone, gets these votes.) By day's end 40,000 of 278,000 ballots cast in the county had been recounted, and Franken had netted 10 votes. Only 13 were challenged, and both campaigns thought the process was going smoothly.

This display of "Minnesota nice" was a respite from what has otherwise been the nastiest Senate campaign of this cycle. For months, Franken attacked Coleman for taking gifts from lobbyists and being George Bush's lackey. Coleman blasted Franken back for failing to pay his taxes, for making rape jokes as a comedian, and for writing "Porn-o-Rama!"—an article for *Playboy* that read more like, well, porn than Swiftian satire. Almost 3 million votes were cast on Election Day, and when results were formally certified, Coleman led by just 215 votes. The GOP's ability to filibuster hinges on the uncertain outcome of this recount and the December 2 runoff in Georgia.



A contested ballot

ILLUSTRATION: GARY LOCKE

As we went to press, 42 percent of the ballots had been recounted, and Coleman's lead over Franken had dwindled from 215 to 129. Franken is so far gaining as election officials catch votes that the voting machines missed, but, "there could very likely be some counting errors here as well," says Ramsey County elections manager Joe Mansky. Hand-counting, which is required by state law in a recount, is "frankly not as accurate" as machine counting, he says. If an election official places a ballot in the wrong pile or accidentally counts 99 ballots as 100, that error will be part of the final tally unless one of the campaign representatives catches the mistake. There are no third chances. There's also no way to tell if human error is breaking in favor of one candidate.

The recount must be completed by December 5 and the canvassing board will begin examining the challenged ballots and issuing final rulings on December 16. (So far, the Coleman and Franken campaigns have challenged 734 ballots, with an almost equal number challenged by each campaign.) The board has two state Supreme Court justices (both appointed by Republican governor Tim Pawlenty), two district court judges (who lean to the left), and Minnesota's secretary of state (a Democrat).

The canvassing board's recount of the challenged ballots is intended to be transparent—scanned images of the ballots may be viewed by the public—but Republicans are alleging that Secretary of State Mark Ritchie is fiercely partisan and won't be a fair arbiter of the process. Ritchie didn't help matters when he was asked by a television reporter about the Coleman campaign's criticism of election officials and replied, "Their goal is to win at any price."

In an interview in Ritchie's office on the first day of the recount, I asked him if he feels the Franken campaign is also trying to win at any price. "Yeah," he said. "All campaigns take this as a very serious matter. All campaigns do this to win for their candidate, and my job is to determine what the citizens wanted." Asked if there are specific examples of the Franken campaign's promoting distortions, Ritchie pointed to their false claim that an elderly woman's absentee ballot was denied because she had a stroke and her signature on the ballot didn't match the one on file. The county auditor told a local newspaper

John McCormack is a deputy online editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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that the county "does not have one ballot that was rejected because signatures didn't match. . . . The Franken campaign was clearly told that."

While the Coleman campaign hasn't pushed any such clear falsehoods, some of their complaints about the integrity of the vote count are unfounded. For example, Coleman's lead shrunk from 725 votes the morning after the election all the way down to 215 votes when the results were certified after county election officials rechecked their unofficial vote totals for errors. Coleman campaign manager Cullen Sheehan attributed the narrowing vote gap to "statistically dubious and improbable shifts." And a *Wall Street Journal* editorial declared it odd that in one liberal precinct in the town of Two Harbors "Franken picked up an additional 246 votes. In Partridge Township, he racked up another 100."

But in the Two Harbors precinct, the vote tally in the presidential race was 336 for Barack Obama and 175 for John McCain. Norm Coleman's total was 175, and the count for the independent candidate Dean Barkley was 74. *Without* the correction, Franken's tally would have been 27 votes—unbelievably low for a Democratic precinct. The original numbers in Partridge Township were also obviously a result of error. Though suspicions were raised before Election Day when it was reported that the left-wing advocacy group ACORN had registered 43,000 new voters in Minnesota, no evidence of serious voting irregularities has yet emerged anywhere in the state.

Not that this has deterred the Franken campaign from angling to take the race to the courts. They are already petitioning the state canvassing board to include rejected absentee ballots in its final count, to which—surprise!—the Coleman campaign strongly objects. Franken campaign attorney Marc Elias said that failing to include the rejected absentee ballots "would be a problem under Minnesota state law and under the United States Constitution." In the end, if the Coleman-Franken race turns into a hard fought legal battle, Minnesota could end up looking a lot like Florida. Except this time, members of the U.S. Senate—controlled by 58 Democrats—would have the final authority to seat either candidate.

If it comes to that, the world's greatest deliberative body would do well to act like the Democrats and Republicans gathered in the Ramsey County office building at the end of the first day's recount. The elections manager laid the 13 challenged ballots on a table before top representatives from each campaign. Even if the oval next to the name of only one candidate wasn't perfectly filled in, the voter's intent was clear on 12 of them (7 for Franken, 5 for Coleman). On one, a voter used checkmarks; on others a dot was placed in one candidate's oval and the other was completely filled in. The Coleman and Franken campaign representatives agreed it was a wash and withdrew all 12 challenges to keep the state canvassing board from having to waste its time looking at frivolous challenges. ♦

The Mosque and the Imam

Washington's Islamic Center is riven by scandal and lawsuits. BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

The Islamic Center in Washington, D.C., is among the most prominent and opulent Muslim prayer houses in America. It displays the national flags of Muslim countries out front and makes obvious to thousands of passing motorists that the faith of Muhammad has a place in America.

That was the message delivered by President Dwight D. Eisenhower when the mosque was opened in 1957. The chief executive (accompanied by his wife, Mamie, who unlike later American first ladies Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush saw no need to don an Islamic head covering) declared,

> The countries which have sponsored and built this Islamic Center have for centuries contributed to the building of civilization. With their traditions of learning and rich culture, the countries of Islam have added much to the advancement of mankind. Inspired by a sense of brotherhood, common to our innermost beliefs, we can here together reaffirm our determination to secure the foundations of a just and lasting peace.

Eisenhower concluded,

> Our country has long enjoyed a strong bond of friendship with the Islamic nations. . . . Under the American Constitution, . . . this Center, this place of worship, is as welcome as could be any similar edifice of any religion. Indeed, America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have your own church and worship according to your own conscience. Without this, we would be something else than what we are.

The Islamic Center was built at the suggestion of the Egyptians, but with support from Christian and Muslim Arabs and Turks in America, along with Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi, Indonesian, Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian diplomats and the Saudi royal family. The Nizam of Hyderabad, a fabulously rich Muslim dignitary in India, and the Aga Khan, global leader of the Ismaili Shias, were solicited for large contributions. Later assistance came from Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and Tunisia. And

Stephen Schwartz is a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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U.S. corporations with interests in the Muslim world—Bechtel and the Arabian American Oil Co. (later Saudi Aramco), among others—kicked in. According to an official *History of the Islamic Center* issued in 1978, construction was slowed by the diversion of Arab attention to the fight against Jewish immigration to the state of Israel. Yet the mosque was completed and remains an impressive showpiece.

Since the late 1980s, however, the Islamic Center has come to be representative of the corruption of American Islam under the domination of the radical Wahhabi sect and its Saudi patron.

In 1978 the director of the mosque was Ardeshir Zahedi, ambassador of the shah of Iran. With the overthrow of the monarchy in Tehran the next year, the mosque fell into the hands of pro-Khomeini extremists, who became involved in one of the earliest and worst incidents of radical Islamist terrorism on American soil.

On July 22, 1980, Ali Akbar Tabatabai, a former employee of the Iranian embassy in Washington and opponent of the dictatorship of the ayatollahs, was shot to death at his home in Bethesda, Maryland. The killer was an American convert to Islam, David Belfield, known as Dawud Salahuddin, who confessed to the crime in an interview with ABC television's *20/20* in 1996. Belfield had been active in Islamic outreach (*da'wa*) to African Americans in U.S. prisons. Having killed Tabatabai, he fled to Iran, and in 2001 he appeared in the Iranian film *Kandahar* acting under the pseudonym Hassan Tantai.

In 1983, after much internal controversy, the Islamic Center was taken over by Saudi officials. The next year, a new director, or chief imam, was sent to the mosque—Saudi subject Abdullah M. Khouj. Khouj's credentials, which became public in a messy lawsuit beginning in 2006, were, in retrospect, problematic.

Khouj represented the Muslim World League (MWL), founded in Saudi Arabia in 1962 as an international agency for the propagation of Wahhabism. In 2006, relief branches of the MWL in Southeast Asia would be designated by the U.S. Treasury as financing fronts for al Qaeda. In addition, Khouj was admitted to the United States as a diplomat, allegedly serving as an attaché at the Saudi Embassy, but actually dedicated to advancing the most radical interpretation of Islam in history. His diplomatic visa allowed Khouj to receive a tax-free monthly personal salary of $10,920. He also received $50,000 a month to run the mosque, which he kept in his personal account. The State Department, from 1998 to 2001, pressed the Saudi embassy to explain why its purported attaché was running a major mosque.

And Khouj's résumé betrayed yet another lapse: While the bylaws of the mosque called for its chief imam to hold a doctoral degree in Islamic studies, Khouj had training only in psychology.

Still, Khouj was a thorough Wahhabi, and that was what counted for his Saudi masters. Until 2002, his monthly budget of up to $50,000 was provided by the Saudi government. The Religious Affairs Department of the Saudi embassy also oversaw the calendar of preaching at the mosque, with an emphasis on Wahhabi extremist content.

In 2002, the State Department prevailed on the Saudis to change Khouj's visa status to the one normally assigned to a religious worker. (Thus, Khouj was not among the 70 Saudi subjects using diplomatic visas as cover for Wahhabi *da'wa* who were ordered to leave the United States in 2003-04.) The imam then declared to U.S. tax authorities an income of no more than $40,000 a year, a gigantic reduction. In further violation of U.S. visa regulations, however, Khouj failed to disclose that he was an employee of a foreign government.

President Eisenhower at the dedication of the mosque, with Mamie looking on

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Khouj had other bad habits. He came to the United States with a wife and two children, but his wife soon returned to Saudi Arabia. The imam then acquired at least two new wives—Debbi Estrada and Noufisa Zourhi—both of whom he supported out of mosque funds. He also got himself in trouble in 1986 when he precipitously proposed marriage to a young woman interested in Islam, consummated the marriage, and then tried to hold her captive in his residence. The woman, whose identity remains undisclosed, threatened to call the police, but was appeased by a payment of $5,000. In a *Washington Post* op-ed in 1988, Khouj had recourse to a common Wahhabi

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defense of Saudi oppression of women, writing, "In what way is adultery, as practiced in the West, superior to a legal married state of polygamy?"

In other ways, too, Khouj kept the Wahhabi banner flying at the Massachusetts Avenue mosque. He sought to bar women from the main prayer space during mosque services, for instance, a typical Wahhabi stricture. And he welcomed Osama Basnan to the Islamic Center. In 2002 Basnan was deported to Saudi Arabia for visa fraud and on suspicion of terrorist ties. A sympathizer of Osama bin Laden, Basnan carried money from Princess Haifa, wife of former Saudi ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan, to two of the September 11 hijackers, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf Alhazmi (see "The Princess and her 'Charities,'" December 9, 2002). Khouj also invited Ali al-Timimi to preach at the Islamic Center. In 2005 al-Timimi was convicted of soliciting others to wage war against the United States and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Wahhabism, visa deception, promotion of extremism, polygamy and other mistreatment of women—the whole distasteful package began unraveling in 2005. With an aspiring, often-thwarted reformer preparing to ascend the Saudi throne that year, Khouj was suddenly confronted with a demand for an audit of his expenditures, which would have exposed his use of mosque funds to maintain his wives.

Khouj did not want an audit conducted by an outside accountant, and made plans to leave the United States. No audit was carried out. Since his arrival in Washington, Khouj had entrusted delivery of money for his wives to Farzad Darui, a companion of the murdered Iranian dissident Ali Akbar Tabatabai. Darui had assumed security duties at the mosque after 1980, working (often unsuccessfully, given the Saudi influence) to oppose discrimination against women and to exclude radicals. Darui had served as a volunteer until the mosque's board of directors put him on the payroll.

In 2005, a conflict broke out between the mosque board, backed by Darui and non-Saudi Muslim diplomats, on one side, and the Saudi embassy's Religious Affairs Department on the other, over an attempt to replace Khouj. After the uproar, the Saudi embassy began circulating rumors that Darui had been stealing money from the mosque. In November 2006, the mosque, represented by the firm Williams & Connolly, sued Darui for embezzlement. Khouj alleged that hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of checks he had written for legitimate mosque expenses had been altered by Darui for payment

The Islamic Center, Washington, D.C.

to Darui's businesses, Blue Line Travel and Zaal, Inc., an investment and management company.

Darui said Khouj had written the checks to pay for the needs of his wives. The original suit was dismissed, but the U.S. government, with Khouj as its sole witness regarding alteration of the checks, then charged Darui with nine counts of mail fraud, interstate transportation of stolen property, money laundering, and theft, alleging that he had rented a U.S. Postal Service box to divert stolen funds by manually changing the names in the payee lines of the checks. Darui, who has gotten rich on his own and has no need to steal from the mosque, retained the prominent Washington lawyer Victoria Toensing, of diGenova & Toensing, to defend him.

Improbably, the government argued that Bank of America, which honored more than 200 checks, totaling $430,000 from 2000 to 2006, submitted and supposedly altered by Darui, never detected such tampering. The government presented not original checks but Xerox copies as evidence at the trial. Court filings revealed that on some of the cashed checks notations in the memo line stated that their purpose was to pay for housing, rent, and similar expenses seemingly inconsistent with the payee line.

To cite but one of 23 Xeroxed checks entered into evidence and originally written to pay Estrada's rent, a check dated August 15, 2002, showed the payee as "Travelers," an insurance company. The copy furnished by Bank of America had the payee as "Zaal, Inc." The memo line on both included the word "Housing," a peculiar basis for payment to an insurance company.

During the trial, Khouj testified that in 2003-04 he donated his newly declared salary of $2,563 per month to the mosque. But defense lawyers showed that Khouj had deposited all 24 bimonthly checks from the period to his personal account. Khouj told the FBI that Darui had cashed two checks issued to Khouj by the Saudi embassy. The defense produced deposit slips showing that those two checks also had been deposited to Khouj's account.

In May of this year, the first prosecution of Darui ended in a mistrial. But the U.S. authorities refiled the case. DiGenova & Toensing then filed a post-mistrial brief alleging that the Saudis and Khouj, rather than the defendant, had altered the checks, perhaps by using Photoshop technology. The defense lawyers further charged that Khouj had committed many acts of perjury and obstruction of justice in the case. All of the foregoing is documented in public court filings.

Khouj's secretary at the mosque, Fatoumata Goodwin, did not respond to an email request for comment on the case. The question remains: Why should the U.S. government side with a Wahhabi cleric and the Saudi reactionaries, with their long career of contempt for American morality and law, in a manner that seems to impeach the competence of a leading American bank, while persecuting an opponent of radical Islam? ♦

SIMON P.

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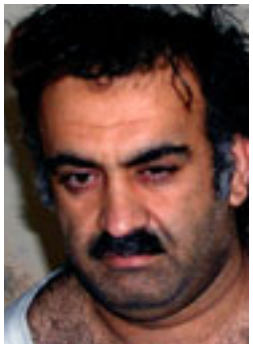
Clear and Present Danger

The Obama administration is about to discover that the terrorists detained at Guantánamo are there for good reason



From left: Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Ahmed Ressam, Ahmed Zaid Salim Zuhair, Majid Khan, Ramzi Binalshibh

Ressam, Newscom; Khan and Binalshibh, Associated Press

By Thomas Joscelyn

On Sunday, November 16, CBS News's *60 Minutes* broadcast the first interview with President-elect Barack Obama. The exchange touched on a wide range of topics, from Obama's distaste for college football's computerized selection of a national champion to his plans for changing course in economic and foreign policy. At one point, Obama was asked about the terrorist detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He responded:

> I have said repeatedly that I intend to close Guantánamo, and I will follow through on that. I've said repeatedly that America doesn't torture and I'm going to make sure that we don't torture. Those are part and parcel of an effort to regain America's moral stature in the world.

The president-elect's comments were not surprising. He had often promised on the campaign trail to close Guantánamo. And in the days before the *60 Minutes* broadcast, anonymous officials from his transition team had let the press know that the president-elect would deliver on his pledge. They cannot yet say what the Obama administration will do with the 250 or so detainees still being held, but according to the *Washington Post*, the new team will review the government's files on each detainee and make a determination case by case.

Whatever happens to the detainees, the important point for much of the commentariat is that Guantánamo will be shuttered. For Guantánamo's many critics, the facility long ago became a symbol of all that is wrong with the Bush administration's conduct of the war on terror—from its cowboy-like unilateralism to its alleged widespread torture and abuse of terrorist suspects. That many dangerous enemies lurk in Guantánamo's cells has often been a secondary concern, if a concern at all. Thus, when President-elect Obama spoke of regaining "America's moral stature in the world," he was endorsing the widespread perception of Guantánamo as an American sin that originated in the Bush administration's overreaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

This perception, however, was always skewed. The new administration will soon discover from its review of the Guantánamo files what motivated its predecessor: The scope of the terrorist threat was far greater than anyone knew on September 11, 2001. But for the Bush administration's efforts, many more Americans surely would have perished.

Thomas Joscelyn is the senior editor of the website Long War Journal. *Jonathan Church assisted in the research for this article.*

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This conclusion is based on a careful review of the thousands of pages of documents released from Guantánamo, as well as other publicly available evidence. In 2006, the Department of Defense began to release the documents to the public via its website. The files had been created during the Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRT) and Administrative Review Board (ARB) hearings held for nearly 600 detainees. This unclassified cache includes both the government's allegations against each detainee and summarized transcripts of the detainees' testimony. Although the documents were released in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed by the Associated Press, the intelligence contained in the files was largely ignored by the mainstream press for more than two years. Thus, the *New York Times* reported only the day before the recent presidential election that the files contain "sobering intelligence claims against many of the remaining detainees."

The successful prosecution of some of those responsible for the first World Trade Center bombing, as worthwhile as it was, did little to disrupt the broader terrorist network, which grew exponentially between 1993 and 2001.

Indeed, they do. When the Obama administration reviews the Guantánamo files, here is what it will find.

THE HIGH VALUE DETAINEES

The most dangerous men currently incarcerated at Guantánamo are the 14 "high value" detainees. The Bush administration gave them this designation because they are uniquely lethal, having planned and participated in the most devastating terrorist attacks in history. Their collective dossier includes, among other attacks, 9/11, the American embassy bombings (August 7, 1998), the USS *Cole* bombing (October 12, 2000), and the Bali bombings (October 12, 2002). They are responsible for murdering thousands of civilians around the globe, from the eastern United States to Southeast Asia. Had they not been captured, they surely would have murdered thousands more.

The 14 were originally held not at Guantánamo, but at even more controversial black sites. And the "enhanced interrogation techniques" that have sparked international outrage were principally designed for them. One may doubt the necessity and morality of these techniques, including waterboarding, while still recognizing a fundamentally important point: The 14 high value detainees are not ordinary criminals, but perpetrators of an entirely different order of evil.

It is because of these men, in particular, that the Bush administration initiated the preventive detention regime of which Guantánamo is a part. Processing them as mere lawbreakers would not have advanced the war on terror. To read them their rights and provide them lawyers would have been to throw away their intelligence value. It would have allowed them to carry to the grave many details of still active terrorist plots. The Bush administration chose a different route—harsh interrogations designed to ferret out al Qaeda's current operations before it was too late to stop them or capture those involved.

It is not clear from the early press reports whether the Obama administration will continue preventive detention in any form. Some accounts suggest that the president-elect wants to abandon it entirely, rather than reforming it. During the campaign, Obama said he wanted to return to the way we did things in the 1990s, when terrorists were put on trial after the fact. "And, you know, let's take the example of Guantánamo," Obama said. "What we know is that, in previous terrorist attacks—for example, the first attack against the World Trade Center—we were able to arrest those responsible, put them on trial. They are currently in U.S. prisons, incapacitated."

This is not true. The chief bomb designer for the 1993 strike on the World Trade Center, Ramzi Yousef, was eventually detained years after the attack and was then convicted, and imprisoned. But the man who mixed the chemicals for the bomb, Abdul Rahman Yasin, is still at large, having fled to Saddam's Iraq shortly after the bomb left a crater several stories deep in southern Manhattan. More important, Obama's comment misses the fundamental lesson of 9/11. The successful prosecution of some of those responsible for the first World Trade Center bombing, as worthwhile as it was, did little to disrupt the broader terrorist network, which grew exponentially between 1993 and 2001. The best evidence of this is the fact that Ramzi Yousef's uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed ("KSM"), continued to operate unmolested long after his nephew was confined at a maximum security prison in Colorado.

KSM is the best known of the high value detainees imprisoned at Guantánamo. According to the 9/11 Commission, he first proposed to Osama bin Laden the plot that grew into the September 11 attacks, and he was involved throughout the operation. KSM has also admitted involvement in dozens of other plots and attacks, including providing some of the funds for the 1993 World

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Trade Center bombing. Members of KSM's family have been at the heart of al Qaeda's conspiracy. Another of KSM's nephews, Ammar al-Baluchi, is a high value detainee at Guantánamo. The government's files note that Ammar was a "key lieutenant for KSM" during the September 11 operation.

Ramzi Binalshibh, one of KSM's 9/11 coconspirators, is another high value detainee at Guantánamo. He was al Qaeda's chief liaison between the hijackers living in the West and more senior terrorists, such as KSM, who resided in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Al Qaeda central needed Binalshibh to coordinate various details of the plot. And the hijackers, including their ringleader, Mohammed Atta, relied on Binalshibh for both advice and cash. Some of the money Binalshibh provided the hijackers came from another high value detainee, Mustafa Ahmad al-Hawsawi. During the week prior to 9/11, four of the hijackers returned unused funds to al-Hawsawi.

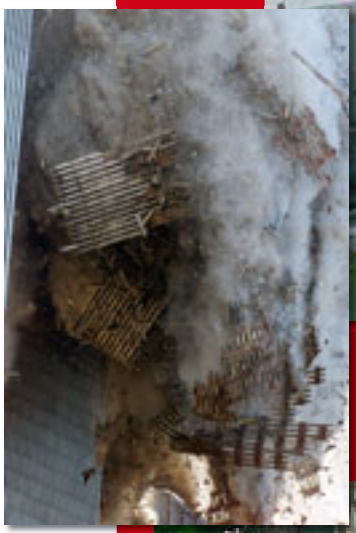
If the new administration follows the vision set forth by candidate Obama, terrorists such as KSM, Binalshibh, al-Baluchi, and al-Hawsawi will be tried in our federal courts with the same constitutional protections as American citizens including the presumption of innocence. But trying elite terrorists for their crimes does nothing to expose the unconsummated plots they had already set in motion at the time of their capture. Had the Bush administration taken this approach, it is likely that America would have failed to stop many al Qaeda terrorist operations that were in fact foiled.

For example, in his autobiography, *At the Center of the Storm*, former Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet explained that KSM's interrogation led to the arrest of an entire cell that was plotting destruction. The same day KSM was detained in 2003, another terrorist named Majid Khan was picked up. During his interrogation, KSM admitted that Khan had recently passed along $50,000 to operatives working for al Qaeda's chieftain in Southeast Asia, a man known as Hambali. When interrogators confronted Khan with KSM's revelation, Khan confirmed it and said that he gave the money to an agent of Hambali named Zubair. Khan gave his interrogators Zubair's telephone number. Shortly thereafter, Zubair was taken into custody and gave up information that led to the arrest of yet another operative nicknamed "Lilie." According to Tenet, Lilie then provided information that led to Hambali's arrest in Thailand.

Khan, Hambali, Zubair, and Lilie are all high value detainees at Guantánamo. They were plotting the "second wave" of attacks on America when they were captured. According to the Guantánamo files, Zubair and Lilie were

A TRAIL OF TERROR

The most dangerous men at Guantánamo are 14 "high value" detainees who were given this designation because they are uniquely lethal, having planned and participated in the most devastating terrorist attacks in history. Their collective dossier includes, among other attacks, those pictured here.



From top: American embassy bombings (1998), the USS *Cole* bombing (2000), 9/11 (2001), and the Bali bombings (2002).

Bombing of embassy and World Trade Center, Associated Press; USS Cole, Newscom; Bali, Landov

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both chosen to be suicide hijackers in an al Qaeda attack on Los Angeles. They had also plotted against targets in Southeast Asia under the direction of Hambali. Hambali was responsible, in part, for planning the 2002 Bali bombings (killing more than 200 people) and a series of attacks on 30 churches in Indonesia on Christmas Eve 2000 (killing 19).

In addition to serving as an intermediary between KSM and the Hambali crew, Majid Khan was involved in other post-9/11 plots. Khan, who lived in Baltimore for years, was planning to smuggle explosives into the United States. He wanted to target gas stations and landmarks such as the Brooklyn Bridge, and he recommended to KSM that a truck driver living in Ohio named Iyman Faris could help. Faris, who had trained at an al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan, had begun preparations for these attacks. But within weeks of KSM's and Khan's capture, Faris was identified and arrested. Months later, Faris was convicted of providing material support to al Qaeda and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Another of Khan's accomplices, a Pakistani named Uzair Paracha, was also arrested just weeks after Khan and KSM. In late March 2003, authorities raided Uzair's apartment in Brooklyn. There they found a number of incriminating pieces of evidence linking Uzair to Khan. In 2005 Uzair was convicted, and in 2006 he was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison.

Uzair's father, Saifullah Paracha, is a current resident of Guantánamo. Although he has not been designated a high value detainee, he clearly consorted with terrorists. Saifullah is reportedly a multimillionaire who owns a Pakistani media company and a textile business, which exported goods to the United States. Al Qaeda wanted to use Saifullah's textile business to smuggle explosives into the United States. Saifullah also offered his media company's services to Osama bin Laden for the production of al Qaeda's propaganda.

KSM and Khan were not the only high value detainees to give up crucial, life-saving details during their interrogations. In March 2002, Abu Zubaydah was captured at his safe house in Faisalabad, Pakistan. In *At the Center of the Storm*, Tenet says that Zubaydah unwittingly gave up information that led to the capture of Ramzi Binalshibh on September 11, 2002. At the time, Binalshibh was plotting an attack on Heathrow Airport in London. At least several of the detainees at Guantánamo were captured along with Zubaydah at his safe house in 2002, and they too were involved in al Qaeda's post-9/11 plotting. For example, Zubaydah intended to use one of them in an attack on Israel.

The greatest success of the Bush administration is that it stopped all of this, and more, from happening. The continental United States was under attack from an enemy unlike any other this nation has ever faced. There was no easy legal precedent or historical analogy. In the wake of 9/11, the Bush administration had to make up new rules as it went along. Critics are free to charge that the administration went too far. But the Obama administration may rapidly discover that treating the terrorist threat like any other matter in federal court, as candidate Obama proposed, is not only unrealistic but also dangerous.

It is true that the courts have had some notable post-9/11 successes, such as the convictions of Uzair Paracha and Iyman Faris. But those individuals were found out only because the Bush administration employed new methods to fight terrorism. Perhaps the Obama administration can achieve the same results without using the interrogation techniques employed by its predecessor. But it would be foolish to think that the government can eschew interrogations outside of the federal criminal justice system entirely. Going forward, the new president will need to approve at least some proactive measures if he is to stop al Qaeda's next attack.

Moreover, waging the war on terror requires more than just stopping individuals such as the 14 high value detainees. Tens of thousands of terrorists mean this nation harm. And over 200 of them remain at Guantánamo.

THE TERROR NETWORK

The high value detainees are the sharp tip of a very long spear. The threat they pose is relatively easy to identify. But the Obama administration is sure to ask: How dangerous are the other detainees?

Most of the 800 detainees held at one time or another at Guantánamo have been released or transferred. According to published reports, approximately 250 remain. Who they are is not entirely clear. The Pentagon has not released an official list.

In October, the *New York Times* published an online database listing 248 current detainees, in addition to the 14 high value prisoners. The *Times* compiled this list through an exhaustive search of articles and other publicly available information. THE WEEKLY STANDARD has performed a similar review. While the list generated by the *Times* probably includes a handful of detainees who have been released or transferred, it appears to be mostly accurate. In any event, it is the best available.

The Department of Defense has released files for all but 6 of the 248 detainees on the *Times*'s list. We reviewed all of the unclassified documents for these 242 detainees as part of a comprehensive six-month study. Here are our findings.

While the 242 detainees may be less important than operatives at the level of KSM or Ramzi Binalshibh, it is clear that a number of dangerous individuals reside at Guantánamo. One such is Mohamed Qahtani, the ter-

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rorist who was selected by al Qaeda to become the "20th hijacker" on 9/11 but was turned away from the Orlando Airport by a suspicious immigration official. Qahtani is a member of a group dubbed the "Dirty Thirty," who were captured by Pakistani authorities while attempting to flee Afghanistan. They include a number of bodyguards for Osama bin Laden. At least several of the "Dirty Thirty" terrorists remain at Guantánamo.

But how should the Obama administration weigh the intelligence against Guantánamo residents who lack even Qahtani's high profile? We have identified four red flags the Obama administration should look for in the Guantánamo files. This methodology bears some similarities to that employed by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point in its study of the documents generated by the CSRTs at Guantánamo. Our study reviews those files, as well as the more comprehensive documents produced during the ARB hearings at Guantánamo. The new administration, of course, will have access to both of those sets of documents, as well as to the classified information on each detainee.

Aftermath of the bombing of Kanisius Church in Jakarta during mass on Christmas Eve, 2000

NEWSCOM

RED FLAG 1: Evidence that a detainee was committed to waging jihad, or holy war, against the perceived enemies of Islam is our first red flag. Jihad was a powerful motivation for many of the Guantánamo detainees, who traveled hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to get to Afghanistan. The Guantánamo files confirm that al Qaeda operates an extensive recruitment and indoctrination network stretching from the heart of Arabia to the mosques of Europe. Veteran jihadists, along with Islamic clerics, often act as recruiters, enticing the willing with heroic tales of fighting Allah's war. The recruiters frequently make travel arrangements, paying for recruits' travel and suggesting common routes to Afghanistan (mostly through Pakistan and Iran). Sheikhs also support al Qaeda's recruitment network by giving fiery sermons and issuing *fatwas* (religious edicts) calling for Muslims to support the jihad in Afghanistan against the United States, just as they called earlier for jihad against the Soviets, then the Northern Alliance. The call for jihad in Bosnia and Chechnya has also been a powerful recruitment tool, with wannabe jihadists sent first to Afghanistan to learn how to fight.

Of the 242 current detainees identified by the *Times*, our review found at least 116 (48 percent) to be allegedly connected to the jihadist recruiting network. This includes both recruiters and those recruited or inspired by the network to wage jihad. It does not include detainees who decided on their own to wage jihad or were inspired by other means including al Qaeda's propaganda.

One recruiter now at Guantánamo, a Mauritanian named Mohamedou Slahi, is particularly noteworthy. Slahi swore *bayat* (an oath of loyalty) to Osama bin Laden in 1990. He then trained at an al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan beginning in January 1991, followed bin Laden to Sudan, and later relocated to Germany. There, he recruited Ramzi Binalshibh and three 9/11 hijackers to al Qaeda's cause. The four recruits first traveled to Afghanistan for training at Slahi's urging. Slahi also spent some time as the imam of a mosque in Montreal. During Slahi's stint in Montreal, he allegedly facilitated al Qaeda's "millennium plot" against the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Ahmed Ressam, the would-be LAX bomber, was captured while attempting to cross the Canadian border en route to California with a car full of explosives. Slahi most likely mentored Ressam during their time together in Montreal.

RED FLAG 2: On their way to join the jihad, most al Qaeda and Taliban recruits stay in guesthouses. The Obama administration should look for connections with these establishments in the Guantánamo files. The unclassified documents confirm that they are located throughout Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The word "guesthouse" may sound innocuous at first blush, but not just anyone can gain

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admittance. The guesthouse operators usually require that a known al Qaeda or Taliban member vouch for those who wish to stay there. And new residents are typically required to turn in their passports or other identification papers, sometimes receiving a new identity, before being shuttled off to a training facility or the front lines. The guesthouses also provide rudimentary religious and weapons training and act as staging facilities where jihadist fighters regroup between missions.

Of the 242 current detainees identified by the *Times*, our review found that at least 146 (60 percent) are alleged to have either operated or stayed in an al Qaeda or Taliban guesthouse.

Two guesthouse operators still in custody at Guantánamo warrant special scrutiny. The Rabbani brothers, Abu Rahman and Mohammed, operated a series of guesthouses for al Qaeda. The 9/11 Commission report says that the hijackers responsible for securing the planes on 9/11 stayed at a guesthouse that KSM requested Abu Rahman to secure in Karachi, Pakistan. They were then deployed to the United States. Other 9/11 hijackers stayed at the Karachi guesthouse as well. One Guantánamo file notes that Abu Rahman "identified 17 of the September 11, 2001, hijackers" as having stayed at his guesthouse. He was also able to identify several of the terrorists responsible for the August 7, 1998, embassy bombings as men he had assisted. Mohammed Rabbani, according to the Guantánamo files, assisted the retreat of 50 to 60 al Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan in December 2001.

Throughout the controversy, the Bush administration has made only minimal efforts to explain its actions to the American people. As a result, coverage of Guantánamo has been one-sided.

RED FLAG 3: The Taliban's Afghanistan was a hub for terrorist training, and the Obama administration should look for evidence that a Guantánamo detainee received or provided training at one of the many facilities operated there by either the Taliban or al Qaeda. Prior to 9/11, both al Qaeda and Taliban trainees mingled at training facilities throughout Afghanistan. Some of these camps, such as the infamous al Farouq, offered basic training for those wishing to fight. Other camps, such as bin Laden's Tarnak Farms, were reserved for more specialized terrorist training. Recruits who traveled to Afghanistan could learn everything from how to operate an AK-47 to how to use poison or construct a truck bomb.

Of the 242 current detainees identified by the *Times*, our review found that at least 174 (72 percent) were either trainers or trainees. In a few instances, this training took place outside of Afghanistan, in, for example, Bosnia or Pakistan.

Al Qaeda's trainers are typically drawn from the ranks of the most experienced fighters. One current Guantánamo inmate, a Saudi named Ahmed Zaid Salim Zuhair, fought in Bosnia in the 1990s and later became an instructor at al Farouq. When captured, Zuhair had in his possession the watch of an American named William Jefferson, who worked for the United Nations in Bosnia and who was shot to death on November 21, 1995. One Guantánamo file notes that Zuhair "is believed to be responsible" for Jefferson's death. The Bosnian Supreme Court convicted Zuhair in 2000 for his participation in a car bombing in Mostar on September 18, 1997. But he was not imprisoned. Instead he remained at large, teaching others his methods for mayhem.

Another trainer in pre-9/11 Afghanistan, Noor Uthman Mohammed, was the deputy in charge of the infamous Khalden camp. Khalden was operated for years by high value detainee Abu Zubaydah and graduated many famous recruits, including three of the 9/11 hijackers. After the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Noor fled to Faisalabad, Pakistan, where he stayed in a safe house that Zubaydah operated. Noor was detained alongside Zubaydah, as well as several other current Guantánamo inmates, in late March 2002. One Guantánamo memo notes that Zubaydah was planning to use Noor in an operation against Israel at the time of their capture. During his Combatant Status Review Tribunal, Noor admitted that he was a trainer at Khalden and that he knew Zubaydah, but claimed that none of this had anything to do with al Qaeda. Noor's quasi-denial is meaningless—it is beyond dispute that Khalden was part of al Qaeda's elaborate pre-9/11 training infrastructure.

Terrorist training in Afghanistan was so commonplace that some current Guantánamo detainees have actually attempted to use it in their defense. Binyam Mohammed is an Ethiopian who lived in the United States briefly before moving to the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Mohammed has refused to participate in his hearings at Guantánamo, but one file notes that he admitted to his "personal representative" (provided to each detainee to represent his interests) that he had traveled to Afghanistan to gain the skills necessary to fight in Chechnya but had no other involvement with al Qaeda.

The government believes he was up to much more. According to the Guantánamo files, Binyam met a number of high-ranking al Qaeda officials in Afghanistan and Paki-

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stan. They had tasked Binyam with attacking targets inside the United States. At one point, Binyam and José Padilla, who has been convicted on terrorism-related charges in a U.S. court, apparently investigated the possibility of detonating a "dirty bomb" (made with radioactive material) in the United States. This allegation has proven controversial as detractors say there is no evidence that Binyam or Padilla was even close to constructing such a device. But what is not widely appreciated is that the dirty bomb plot is just one option they discussed with senior al Qaeda terrorists. They also explored a wide range of possible targets and modes of attack, from striking U.S. subways to setting apartment buildings on fire using ordinary gas lines. Both Binyam and his would-be accomplice were caught before any attack could be attempted. Padilla, an American citizen, was captured in Chicago and underwent interrogation using highly controversial methods. Binyam was captured in Pakistan and claims that he, too, was tortured.

RED FLAG 4: Finally, the new administration should look for evidence of participation in hostilities in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Of the 242 current detainees identified by the *Times*, our review identified at least 112 (46 percent) who are alleged to have participated in hostilities. The bulk of these fought on the front lines in Afghanistan against either the Northern Alliance or American forces. But this count also includes detainees who were involved in terrorist attacks or were senior operational commanders in charge of deployed forces.

One detainee, Mohammed Fazl, was the Taliban's army chief of staff. He surrendered to the Northern Alliance with a force of more than 1,000 soldiers. The government's file on Fazl notes that he "was responsible for widespread atrocities against noncombatants."

In sum, 227 (94 percent) of the 242 detainees we studied in detail had at least one of the four red flags outlined above; 181 (75 percent) had two or more red flags. Ultimately, however, this methodology is intended only to be suggestive. There are many other factors the Obama administration should study when weighing its options. Collectively, for example, the detainees have extensive ties to Islamic charities that are known to be al Qaeda fronts. And many of the remaining inmates have interacted with senior al Qaeda officials, including Osama bin Laden. Only a careful review of all of the intelligence on the detainees, classified as well as unclassified, can illuminate just who these individuals are and what they were up to at the time of their capture.

The new administration will also have to contend with the roadblocks that have frustrated its predecessor's efforts to send detainees back to their home countries. Approximately 100 Yemenis, for instance, remain at Guantánamo, but as one file notes, "Yemen is not a nation supporting the Global War on Terrorism." Terrorists detained by Yemini authorities have a pattern of finding their way back to the battlefield.

When President-elect Obama spoke so confidently of closing Guantánamo on *60 Minutes*, he had a receptive audience. For years, the dominant story in the media has been the excesses of the Bush administration. Amazingly, much of this narrative was written by self-interested former inmates and the detainees' attorneys. They are always eager to provide journalists with statements about the evils of Guantánamo.

Throughout the controversy, the Bush administration has made only minimal efforts to engage its critics or explain its actions to the American people. As a result, coverage of Guantánamo has been one-sided, and the intelligence contained in the thousands of pages of unclassified documents has largely been ignored. The full story of the Guantánamo detainees remains to be told.

The faults of the Bush administration go beyond its strange failure to make its case to the public. Its refusal to release a complete list of the remaining detainees is an example of secrecy taken too far. Its use of techniques of dubious legality and morality to extract information is rightly questioned. And the military commissions approved by President Bush have proceeded at a snail's pace—only two detainees have been tried.

Obama will probably end the military commission system. He has suggested that he wants to try some of the detainees in a civilian court. But trying the most dangerous terrorists, such as the 14 high value detainees, in a civilian court will give them a forum in which to grandstand. Classified information, which may be necessary to convict them on some charges, will be difficult to protect in such a setting. It is possible that the Obama administration will create a special national security court to handle some of the cases. This is not a bad idea.

When the Bush administration sent the first detainees to the U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay in 2002, it was improvising—understandable in a situation without precedent. The captured jihadists and terrorist agents were not conventional prisoners of war, and they were not ordinary criminals. In the ensuing seven years, the administration failed to replace its stopgap measure with an institutional response seen as legitimate. Bush's successors should remember, however, that he took the steps he did in the context of a war against enemies who are still seeking to attack our homeland. President Bush, whatever his faults, protected America after September 11, 2001. Shortly, it will fall to President Obama to do the same. ♦

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Building a Better Bailout

It's time to reward virtue

By Lawrence B. Lindsey

The U.S. government's efforts at containing the financial crisis have to date been aimed at shoring up institutions and households that are in trouble. Several hundred billion dollars have been injected into troubled financial institutions, with more on the way, and a whole array of negotiated schemes have been created to keep people in homes for which they cannot pay the mortgage. Yet the Democrats in Congress clamor for more relief, such as bankruptcy "cramdowns," which unilaterally reduce the mortgage payments for people who can't afford them. And still more institutions are lining up for bailouts, most notably the auto companies.

It is quite natural for politicians to seek to target benefits on those that they perceive to be in need. It is the normal political response to the wheel that is squeaking the loudest. Regardless of motive, the reality is that these programs and indeed the bailout's whole approach is failing. Even Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson has now thrown in the towel on his original proposal to buy bad assets from the troubled financial firms: the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). None of the $700 billion targeted for TARP will be used as originally intended. Instead most of it will prop up the capital position of the troubled financial institutions, allowing them to hold existing portfolios of questionable loans on their books. The rest will be spent on other distressed firms and troubled markets.

Recall that it was the efforts to sell TARP and the bailout that caused so much political and economic angst a few months ago. The president went on television to tell the American people that the economy, which had been holding in the relatively flat position for most of the summer, was about to collapse. Retail sales began plunging immediately after the president's speech. A majority of the Republican members of the House voted against their own leadership and the president on the plan and were blamed by the media for the 778 point drop in the Dow that day. As this went to press, the Dow Jones Industrial index stood 2,750 points below where it was the moment the bill finally passed, suggesting that Wall Street didn't think it was a panacea either.

The failure of the original plan was predictable. It contained unworkable logistical hurdles. TARP could only be run through some market mechanism, in which those who needed the relief the least would get the largest share leaving the most desperate institutions adrift, or through direct governmental targeting of those institutions most in need, which would have made a mockery of the market mechanism. The plan was rushed out to meet a perceived need to "build confidence," but the self-imposed political deadline and the need to survive the political log rolling with congressional Democrats meant that the time needed to think it through was not taken.

Hundreds of billions of dollars later, we are left with the same three underlying economic problems the economy faced when the bailout was proposed. First, the troubled housing-related financial assets that TARP was supposed to move onto the government's books are still in the private sector, while the nation's banks rush to pare down their balance sheets in the only way they can—by recouping existing loans and not making any new ones. Second, the housing market continues to fall—prices are down 22 percent from their peak and dropping roughly 1 percent per month. Housing starts are at a 17-year low, and homebuilder confidence is the lowest ever recorded. Third, with unemployment rising and consumer credit tight, household cash flow is in desperate shape. If it doesn't stabilize, the odds are high that the current recession will wind up being as bad as, or possibly even worse than, the deep recessions of 1974-75 and 1980-82.

Lawrence B. Lindsey, a former governor of the Federal Reserve, was special assistant to President Bush for economic policy and director of the National Economic Council at the White House. His most recent book is What a President Should Know . . . but Most Learn Too Late *(Rowman and Littlefield).*

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The country faces three major economic problems: (1) making liquid the troubled housing debt that is clogging up the books; (2) stabilizing home prices; and (3) improving household cash flow. Each can be more easily achieved by rewarding virtue than by continuing down the current path.

The government should offer the option of a new mortgage to everyone now holding one, be it from a Government Sponsored Enterprise like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, a bank, or a mortgage broker. The principal amount would be the same as the existing mortgage. If the homeowner had two mortgages or a home equity line, they could all be rolled together into one new 30-year fixed rate mortgage. The new mortgages should have a substantially lower interest rate than existing mortgages. I suggest 4 percent, but the rate could be slightly higher without affecting the program.

The new mortgage would have one very significant difference: It would be a full recourse loan. That is, if the borrower fell behind in the payments, the government could use any means necessary to get repaid. That means not only foreclosing on the house (as under current mortgages) but also collecting any remaining unpaid sums after the house was foreclosed on by garnishing the wages, bank accounts, and other assets of the borrower. Think of it as the IRS providing the loan on the same collection terms as it does on taxes, or perhaps using the powers the government now has to collect on student loans.

The homeowner would not have to get a credit check, or have the house appraised, or go through the titling process again. There would be no debt-to-income or loan-to-value thresholds to qualify for the new loan. Refinancing on the new terms would be entirely at the discretion of the borrower.

Homeowners would have to think very carefully about taking the new loan. If they went for the lower rate, the obligation to repay would become very real. Individuals whose homes had market values way below the amount of the mortgage would have to be particularly careful. If they planned to live there for many years, there would be no problem. If they did not plan to live there or bought houses as a speculation, they definitely should not take the new financing terms. If they sell the house for less than the mortgage, they would have to come up with the difference from other sources.

Homeowners facing some economic distress but who otherwise would like to stay in their homes, even though the price was below the mortgage, might still find it attractive to take the new financing deal. For example, anyone with a 6 percent mortgage would see a 200 basis point drop in the cost of carrying a home. On a $200,000 mortgage, that would be a saving in principal and interest of $244 per month. (The monthly income of that homeowner is usually in the $3,000 to $4,000 range, so this is a significant saving.) In addition, the monthly payment would likely go down even more on loans that have been in place several years since the principal repayment period would once again become 30 years. If the homeowner is about to face a balloon repayment on a home equity line or an interest-rate readjustment under a variable rate mortgage, the new mortgage terms might make the difference between being able to stay in the home and facing foreclosure.

The key is that homeowners would have to make the choice. Only the homeowner knows whether he or she will be likely to stay in the house and repay the mortgage or be forced to give it up. Under the current arrangements, the homeowner has no incentive or need to signal his or her intentions. Instead, computer-driven models make a probabilistic estimate of how many homeowners in a given mortgage pool will choose foreclosure and what the loss rate will be on the foreclosed house. All of this then gets built into the price of a given mortgage-backed financial asset. Given the risk-averse nature of current markets and the lack of any real information, it is likely that the market price of the mortgage pool is well below the actual likely outcome. But no one knows for sure. As a consequence, Mortgage Backed Securities (MBS) and Collateralized Debt Obligations (CDOs) are clogging up the financial system.

Under the refinancing option, this problem goes away. The world is divided into two sets of homeowners: those who think they will repay and those who don't. Those who think they will repay take the new government mortgage. The old mortgage is repaid. All of the MBS and CDOs in the system therefore face immediate full-dollar repayment of all the "good" loans in the mortgage pool. Everything that is left can pretty much be written down to pennies on the dollar. The uncertainty regarding securities pricing is gone. Banks and the financial markets know with a good deal of precision what each security is worth. In fact, they are handed a series of checks for the bulk of the true value of the security as the wave of refinancing works its way through the system. Thus, not only is the uncertainty removed, but the entire financial system is liquefied.

This in turn will unfreeze the banking system. There is right now no market for the CDOs, and they remain on the bank's books. This consumes capital. Because of the distress in the market, the value of the CDOs keeps falling, and, as banks must report the value of assets over time, the banks must take a loss. This loss lowers the amount of capital the bank has. Less capital means that banks must shrink the size of their portfolio. But,

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the bad stuff can't be sold. So instead banks must shed good investments, and they are now doing so with a vengeance by refusing to make new loans and resisting the rolling over of existing loans. This starves the economy of credit.

Under my 4 percent mortgage plan, any bank that had to shrink its balance sheet would have a very easy way of doing so as loads of loan repayments would make the bank cash rich. It would no longer have to sell good assets and shrink its loan portfolio. If the amount of repayment exceeded the amount that the bank had marked down its mortgage portfolio, moreover, bank capital would expand rather than contract. The bank could then expand its portfolio and make even more loans if it chose to do so. TARP was supposed to do just this, but it didn't as the only information on pricing securities came from those same computer-generated models that misestimated the size of the mortgage problem from the start. Under this plan, virtuous homeowners who actually know they will stay in their home determine the price, and determine it with certainty, rather than relying on some computer model that, frankly, has no idea.

The U.S. economy is in the midst of the fastest decline in consumer spending since 1980. Households are greatly overextended, having taken advantage of many years of very easy consumer credit.

As noted in an earlier article in The Weekly Standard ("High Anxiety," September 29, 2008), the underlying problem in the mortgage market is that the credit terms for home mortgages shifted abruptly from the most generous in history to more-restrictive-than-normal between mid-2006 and late 2007. The result was a drop of more than half in the demand for new mortgages (including refinancing) as measured by the dollar volume of mortgages at a time when there was an excess supply of roughly 3 million homes. In such a situation, prices drop.

The effects of the 4 percent mortgage plan on the housing market would be indirect, but quite real. The first effect would be to leave more people in their homes than would otherwise be the case. With an estimated 18 percent of all mortgage holders now in homes with mortgages that are higher than current market values, providing incentives for people to stay in their current homes is the best way of stopping still more excess supply from coming on the market.

But the government could easily magnify this effect by adding one more change in the mortgage terms: Allow the new mortgage on the house to be assumable. Under this plan, a buyer of a home with a new 4 percent mortgage gets to take over that mortgage as a part of the purchase. This substantially lowers the cost of acquisition and makes the house a far more liquid asset than it otherwise would be. Making a new 4 percent mortgage on an 80 percent loan-to-value mortgage assumable is equivalent to lowering the lifetime carrying cost of buying a home by 20 percent—compared to a mortgage rate of 6 percent. Alternatively, in a market in which all houses now have newly created assumable mortgages, the equilibrium price of homes would rise by 26 percent.

On the positive side, this onetime refinancing will not create a new bubble. New mortgages will not get the new terms, only existing mortgages. So while the plan will stabilize and possibly even increase the price of existing homes with mortgages, the effect is finite. It would take a sustained reduction in rates that applied to new mortgages to produce the financial fuel for another housing bubble.

The flip side is that a refinancing of existing mortgages is unlikely to revive the home construction industry. Homes yet to be built do not have mortgages, and so there is no existing mortgage to roll over under the new terms. This is unlikely to make the plan popular at the National Association of Homebuilders, but we still have a hangover of at least 3 million empty homes. Encouraging the building of new ones at this point would only delay the recovery of the housing market and the relief that is needed for the financial system. Stabilizing existing home prices and providing for financial recovery are, of course, the preconditions for a return to a vibrant home construction industry. So the help for homebuilders in this plan is still there; it is just a matter of timing and prioritization.

The American economy is in the midst of the fastest decline in consumer spending since 1980. The reasons are clear. Households are greatly overextended, having taken advantage of many years of very easy consumer credit conditions. The typical American household, for example, has 1.9 vehicles and 1.75 drivers. Credit is now being cut back drastically. In addition, rising unemployment is putting a crimp on incomes and creating caution among those with jobs.

Much of this is the inevitable reaction to excess. But

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it is also widely accepted that government has a role in making sure the adjustment process does not happen too fast or the cuts become too deep. Hence we hear proposals for more stimulus packages to put money into the pockets of consumers. During the campaign, President-elect Obama called for giving an average of $700 to middle-income families, making up the cost by raising taxes on upper income households.

A refinancing of home mortgages along the lines I am describing would be a much more dramatic stimulus. First, a family with a $200,000 mortgage at 6 percent (typically a family with an income in the $40,000 to $50,000 range) would receive an improvement in their annual cash flow of $3,000, four times as much as the proposed Obama stimulus payment. It is true that the Obama tax cut would also go to people without mortgages. But it is those with mortgages that are the most impacted by current credit conditions. Indeed, a refinancing on this magnitude is far better targeted at those most likely to respond to improved cash flow than are the proposed tax rebates.

The refinancing would also mean a permanent improvement in household financial conditions while a typical onetime stimulus package would not. The lesson from the 2008 stimulus package, and indeed from all other temporary tax cuts, is that the great majority does not enter the spending stream. Refinancing is likely to provide a permanent economic boost.

The refinancing is designed to be roughly budget neutral for the government. Currently the government can borrow for 10 years at about 3.25 percent and under 4 percent for 30 years. Mortgages are typically priced off the 10-year bond. In essence, the government would be borrowing and lending at the same rate. Those especially concerned with budgetary cash flow might prefer a fixed rate loan of 4.25 percent or might also consider putting "points" on the mortgage. As long as the rate remained substantially below current mortgage rates and homeowners were able to roll any points into the principal of their new mortgage, the impact on the incentives to take up the new program would be minimal.

Government would receive one further benefit. As mortgage payments dropped, so would the revenue loss from the mortgage-interest deduction. I estimate the extra revenue from this feature at between $15 billion and $20 billion. As lower income homeowners tend not to itemize and higher income homeowners face an increased tax rate, the distributional consequences of this feature would mean that most of the extra revenue would be collected from higher income homeowners. On the other hand, the prepayment wave would reduce the interest income on the mortgage portfolio held by the GSEs.

The big lesson of the bubbles of the last 20 years is that there is no free lunch. We are now paying the price of both the dot-com bubble and the housing bubble. But there are no free bailouts, either. A wave of refinancing on this magnitude carries a price tag. Done the way it is described here, roughly $9 trillion of mortgages would be refinanced. That is roughly 15 percent of total personal wealth in the country, clearly a huge undertaking.

But it is also worth bearing in mind that this figure exaggerates the true scale of what is happening. This is not a $9 trillion increase in the nation's indebtedness. It is the swapping of $9 trillion of one type of mortgage for $9 trillion of another type of mortgage. There is no net increase in the nation's debt.

There is an increase in government debt. But this is offset by an equal increase in government assets. To begin with, roughly $5 trillion of the mortgages to be refinanced are already on the government's books because of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Funds have to be raised to issue the new mortgages, but each time a new mortgage is issued an existing mortgage of an equal amount is redeemed. The holder of the mortgage, i.e., the lender, bought that mortgage in search of long-term dollar denominated debt. When they are repaid, they will have to do something with the money. The vast bulk of the funds are also likely to be reinvested in long-term dollar denominated debt—particularly long-dated U.S. treasuries. Therefore, the net pressure on the financial markets will be fairly small even though the volume of transactions will be quite large.

There is a reason that government efforts have so far been focused on helping out those who have failed rather than those who have behaved virtuously. The left professes a belief in helping the needy. The right seeks to minimize government involvement and therefore compromises, agreeing to help *only* the needy. During the present crisis, the term "needy" has taken on new dimensions as some of the largest financial institutions in the country are at risk.

It is also far from clear that those who were overextended on their homes, needy by one definition, are also worthy of aid. With regard to real estate, hard-working families can behave prudently while trust fund babies can behave frivolously, and vice versa. The problem is sorting out the prudent from the frivolous. Targeting relief on the frivolous induces people on the margin to behave frivolously. By contrast, targeting relief on those willing to assume full responsibility for their debts in return for a lower interest rate induces people to behave virtuously. A shift toward rewarding virtue would be the quickest way out of the debt morass we now find ourselves in. ♦

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Our Hapless Automakers

The choice before Congress is bankruptcy now or bankruptcy later

By Irwin M. Stelzer

Set out a giant honey pot, and the bears will come. And the more bearish they are about their prospects, the faster they will come and the louder they will grunt. The Bush administration presides over a giant honey pot, containing some $350 billion. And a smaller one, with a mere $25 billion already promised to the once-big, now shriveled three U.S. automakers. Not enough to appease the domestic automakers' desire for a sweetener. "Please sir, can we have more?" say GM, Ford, and Chrysler. If only Congress and the White House would dip into the money originally intended to help financial institutions weather the current credit crisis, they say.

Start with the smaller pot, already authorized by Congress. This $25 billion is available subject to a Democratic-inserted requirement that the companies use the money only for research into battery development and other very green ventures. No green, no greenbacks. President Bush says that if GM is on the verge of bankruptcy all the Democrats in Congress have to do is remove the conditions, and the money will flow to GM and others to meet their immediate cash needs. By the time they burn through that cash pile—at current rates that will take a few months—Barack Obama will be sitting in the Oval Office, from which perch he can decide how much taxpayer money he wants to commit to satisfying the seemingly insatiable appetite of the cash-guzzling trio. Insiders say he has an immediate additional $25 billion in mind, but analysts at Goldman Sachs say that GM alone will need almost half that amount in order to survive the current downturn, never mind finance a major restructuring.

This is really only the tip of a policy iceberg. In days past what America is now involved in was known as "industrial policy," the government picking winners in which it would invest taxpayer money. The relief and stimulus effort didn't start that way. Congress was persuaded to authorize two $350 billion tranches to ease conditions in credit markets by having the government buy shaky IOUs currently on bank balance sheets. That morphed into the later plan to inject capital into the major and some lesser banks. Then came the unintended consequence, the cries of "Why the banks and not us?" To which Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson responds that he does not have the legal authority to transfer money to a purpose not authorized in the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) legislation, a view that Majority Leader Harry Reid considers excessively prissy and legalistic.

Which is where we are now, with the auto companies in the lead, but other industries attempting to dip their paws into the honey pot. Even the advertising industry is talking about the devastating effect of a withdrawal of GM sponsorship from such events as the Super Bowl and the layoffs that would occur on Madison Avenue if help—for it as well as its car making clients?—is not forthcoming. Passage of this loan package would "set a terrible precedent," warns Texas senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. "Why not the airline industry? Why not the other industries?"

The politics are clear. The autoworkers' union that dominates U.S. producers but has failed to organize the plants of foreign companies making cars here in America, helped candidate Obama, and the president-elect has never, never done anything to antagonize any union, much less the UAW, which boasts more than one million active and retired members "in virtually every sector of the economy" and of its "3,100 contracts with some 2,000 employers"—a lot more potent politically than merely the 239,000 workers employed by GM, Ford, and Chrysler. So Obama has promised to help the American-brand automobile makers, although he has been vague on whether the check they get will be a blank one, or be conditioned on firing the CEOs and some of the directors, limiting executive pay, and appointing some sort of government czar to supervise investment, marketing,

Irwin M. Stelzer, a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard, *is director of economic policy studies at the Hudson Institute and a columnist for the* Sunday Times *(London). Employment figures in this article come from the Center for Automotive Research.*

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and other decisions, as was done with the airlines after their post-9/11 bailout. Think of it: a government that hasn't been able to figure out how to give away $700 billion in an optimal way imagines it can decide what sort of vehicles will sell well.

No problem—all of the executives who spent most of last week rattling their begging bowls before congressional committees expressed eagerness to welcome a government oversight/advisory board to their boardrooms. A small price to pay for $25 billion at an initial interest rate of 5 percent.

Two things surprised the auto companies. The first is the weight of the baggage carried by their principal spokesman, GM CEO Rick Wagoner. "We don't like being here asking for this," Wagoner testified. And he liked being there even less when the executives were asked for a showing of hands by all those who had flown to the hearings on commercial airliners (cost $300) rather than in private jets (cost $20,000) and neither he nor his colleagues could raise their hands.

Wagoner's company is in worse shape than Chrysler, and in far worse shape than Ford, which says it can survive without aid through 2009. Wagoner, therefore, has to lead the charge for an immediate infusion of taxpayer cash, and the $10 million spent by GM so far this year on lobbying, plus his own testimony, just doesn't seem to be carrying the day. In part that is because he has the mission impossible of arguing that GM's problems stem from a short-term liquidity crisis caused by high oil prices, tight credit and consumer reluctance to spend—all forces beyond the control of management, which has a sound long-term plan for recovery. Our problem "can be traced right to the crisis on Wall Street," Wagoner contends.

Ah, the good old days

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Unfortunately for his credibility as a victim of recent circumstances beyond his control, Wagoner has been CEO since 2000 and at GM for 31 years, during which period its market share has shriveled from over 50 percent to 20 percent, its losses have mounted so that it is hemorrhaging more than $2 billion in cash every month, and repeated efforts to assure the survival of this "dinosaur," to use Senator Richard Shelby's descriptive term, have failed. The sad truth is that GM became a candidate for the ash heap of history long before the economy's current woes. It has too many workers making too many cars that too few people want, being sold through too many dealers at prices too low to turn a profit, with too many vehicles going to rental fleets which eventually glut the used car market. And despite all of the Detroit automakers' claims about improved quality, its vehicles still lag far behind those of its European competitors in resale value. No cars produced by GM, Ford, and Chrysler rank in the top ten in the authoritative Kelley Blue Book. After five years a typical Chrysler product retains merely 24 percent of its original sticker price, whereas Honda's brands hold onto 45 percent of their original value. That allows the foreign-owned automakers operating in this country to offer more attractive lease terms, still another competitive advantage that domestic companies have made no progress in overcoming.

A second surprise for GM, Ford, and Chrysler has been the extent and intensity of the opposition to a bailout. Republicans and conservatives who believe with economist Allan Meltzer that capitalism without failure is like religion without sin were expected to oppose any bailout. So were longtime opponents of the industry's management, which has been rightly chastised for its failure to increase productivity, but unjustly criticized for emphasizing the manufacture of vehicles consumers want rather than those environmentalists wish consumers would want. Finally, the anti-bailout crowd was expected to include those who feel the UAW has for years extracted such lush benefits packages from the companies that consumers overpaid for vehicles until foreign competitors gained a foothold here. If you doubt that GM's union contracts are a major source of its inability to compete, consider this: Where it is not burdened with such legacy costs, GM is a highly successful company. It produces more cars outside of North America than in it, and is the market leader in China, where it sells over one million cars annually.

But no one guessed that politicians in states in which nonunion foreign automakers such as Toyota, Nissan, Honda, and BMW are providing good jobs for more than 113,000 workers would be quite so vigorous in protecting those companies from unfair, taxpayer-subsidized competition. Alabama, home to Senator Shelby, leader of what might be called the "Drop Dead Detroit" crowd, is one of seven states that is home to a Toyota plant (it has R&D facilities in three other states); Toyota also operates manufacturing facilities in Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, Texas, and Mississippi, and an even more far-flung network of suppliers. Nissan operates production facilities in Mississippi and Tennessee, as does BMW in South Carolina. Honda has plants, and therefore political supporters, in five states, according to Matthew Slaughter, dean of Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business.

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For whatever reason, the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate cannot even count on vigorous support from its own ranks. Senate Banking chairman Christopher Dodd, a reluctant supporter of aid, says, "They're seeking treatment for wounds that, I believe, are largely self-inflicted." And Democrat Jon Tester says that people in his home state of Montana "are experiencing bailout fatigue." The lack of enthusiasm from many Democrats has combined with the active opposition of most Republicans to force the Democratic leadership to throw in the sponge. At midweek Reid gave up efforts to push through a bill that would have allocated $25 billion from the TARP program to the Detroit three. At this writing it seems likely that the administration will prevail, and that Congress, perhaps returning after Thanksgiving to get the necessary legislation done, will override Nancy Pelosi's vociferous objections and remove most of the restrictions that have kept the Treasury from transferring the already agreed-upon $25 billion from taxpayers to auto company coffers. Whether or not that happens, the auto companies will have to await the coming of President Obama before receiving the taxpayer-funded loans they seek—which he will make available, he says, only if he can be shown that "we are creating a bridge loan to somewhere as opposed to a bridge loan to nowhere." And then only if Reid satisfies him that he can get the votes he will need in the Senate, just one example of why the final outcomes of the Senate races in Georgia and Minnesota are so important.

The opposition to the bailout will not go away. And the case for refusing to drop more money into Detroit's bottomless pit is compelling. Michael Levine, research scholar and senior lecturer at NYU law school, pointed out in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece that a bailout will do nothing to lighten the burden of the legacy costs under which GM and others labor. GM and Toyota have almost identical market shares, but GM pushes eight brands through almost 7,000 dealers while Toyota has fewer than 1,500 dealerships. Toyota's larger dealers are better able to advertise, stock, and service the cars they sell. GM knows it needs fewer brands and dealers, but the dealers are protected from termination by state laws. Only a bankruptcy court judge can spare GM the billions of dollars and years of time it would take to pare its dealer numbers to some efficient total.

The automakers know, too, that the relief they have so far been granted by the UAW—and Wagoner has succeeded in wringing a bit of mercy from the bosses of the UAW—will take years to have sufficient impact on costs to make them able to compete with made-in-America foreign brands. New hires will come in at lower wages, but with the age of GM employees averaging around 50 years, it will take a long process of attrition-through-retirement for labor costs to come down.

Worse still, the UAW boasts that its "unique strength . . . is the solidarity between its active and retired workers." So it is not prepared to budge on its program that has tens of thousands of laid-off workers assigned to a "Jobs Bank," with pay and benefits nearly equal to those paid to active workers. Only a bankruptcy court can cut through this barrier to the long-term viability of the three auto companies.

Bankruptcy is not an option, says Wagoner. Car companies are not airlines. Consumers will buy tickets on bankrupt airlines because their relationship with the carrier lasts only for the duration of the flight. But car purchasers are entering a long-term relationship with the manufacturer on whose warranty they must rely. Unfortunately for Wagoner, there is an easy fix to that problem: a government guarantee of warranties backing vehicles sold while GM (or Chrysler) is in bankruptcy. Throw in government guarantees of pension obligations, some retraining and other protection for older workers who might be adversely affected by rulings of the bankruptcy courts, and you have a compassionately conservative solution to the auto industry's problems.

But that is not to be, as some problems can't be fixed. Obama has promised the unions he will make an additional $25 billion available and has announced that in his view viable companies will not emerge from the bankruptcy process. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus want assurance that $1 billion will be allocated to support minority and ethnic auto dealers. Barney Frank wants an end to the "discrimination" that has the government bailing out white-collar workers at AIG but refusing help to blue-collar workers at GM. And no one wants to take note of the fact that foreigners make cars, including trucks and SUVs, and money here in the United States; that Ford's chances of survival would be increased if GM's excess capacity were removed from the industry; that our British friends poured billions into a failed attempt to rescue British Leyland; that replacing poor Rick Wagoner with a politicized, government-run advisory board is unlikely to produce the hard-headed change needed in the company's labor contract; and that studies by NYU professor David Yermack conclude that the capital wasted by our auto companies in the past decade would have been sufficient to acquire "all of the shares of Honda, Toyota, Nissan and Volkswagen."

The choice is bankruptcy now or bankruptcy later, and now beats later by at least $50 billion. Senator Mike Enzi of Wyoming says that because the bill fails to address "the industry's crippling legacy costs . . . I would not be surprised if we find ourselves and the domestic auto industry in the same situation six months, or a year from now." He has it right. ♦

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The author of 'Paradise Lost' at home

Happy Birthday, Milton

The poet-prophet turns 500 BY LAURANCE WIEDER

I wouldn't recommend John Milton's sacred epics, or even his short poems, to a newcomer to the English language.

The poetry of Andrew Marvell, John Donne, William Blake, and Emily Dickinson share his themes, is good to learn by heart, and can enter through many gates. It is written in the vernacular, maybe encrusted by the fashions of their times, but still alluring. Adamantine, hard from the start, Milton's English poetry aspires to biblical Hebrew and, for good or ill, succeeds.

John Milton (1608-1674) is read mostly in university courses (that's by the priestly caste) and by novelists and poets. Unlike the Bible, or Blake, or Dickinson, *Paradise Lost* is not amenable to paraphrase. There's no graphic novelization, no stage or movie treatment even of his life, much less of the (relatively) simple *Paradise Regain'd*. The greatness of his art is its difficulty, its intransigence, its irreducible material. All Milton's settings and actions occur in the mind. Even *Samson Agonistes*, patterned on Greek tragedy, was not intended for performance. Whatever the virtues of the Handel oratorio based on Milton's text, it is something other (and less) than the original.

Paradise Lost, *Paradise Regain'd*, and *Samson Agonistes* were dictated by a blind poet; they were not written. When Milton says "Sing," he's invoking more than literary convention. He couldn't proof his last works, never saw the books in print or read them to himself.

Unless the epics are read aloud, it's impossible to hear them, no matter how developed the inward ear. This presents a daunting task for a generation taught to read to itself without moving the lips. But it's the basic requirement for a reader (or at least for me) to discover what one thought one knew but does not know.

The pressure of speaking about events and forces prior to language required Milton to straddle both sides, to admit the impossibility of what he attempted and still do it. He includes everything he knows, throws everything into his poems, everything he can remember. Memory is the mother of the Muses. It's also the second duty enjoined by the Hebrew

Laurance Wieder is the author of Words to God's Music: A New Book of Psalms.

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Bible. ("Hear, O Israel" would be the first.)

Learning may be a prerequisite to reading John Milton's poetry, but that learning is not impossible. The poems were not opaque to his contemporaries, who shared an English education, urgent political choices, and premessianic unease. The iambic pentameter metronome ticking inside the head of a Renaissance reader kept time for the first line of *Paradise Lost*—"Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit"—and marked disobedience's metrical betrayal.

Likewise, an auditor of the fallen angels' council and debates in Hell did not require academic commentary to connect either the defiant spirit in defeat, or the perils of despair, with the recent Rebellion, Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate, and the Stuart Restoration. It was an age when even theology had consequences.

Creation, the War in Heaven, Chaos, Sin and Death, Satan, Adam and Eve in the Garden and their Fall, Redemption: Even the grandest and remotest of Milton's themes is informed by intimacy struggling with diffidence and guilt. Adam's passionate attachment to (and disappointment in) Eve banks the embers of Milton's three marriages. Jesus' renunciation of gentile poetry and philosophy in *Paradise Regain'd* must have tasted strange in the mouth of the classical scholar. Then there's that howl, Samson lamenting his blindness: *O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, / Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse / Without all hope of day.*

Coming from anyone else, these lines might be bombast. From the lips of one *with mortal voice, unchang'd / To hoarce or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes, / On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues; / In darkness, and with dangers compast round, / And solitude* . . . they are overdetermined. And too true.

It's tempting to think of Milton as all learning and intensity, with no nature. His Cambridge classmates dubbed their long-haired, sober scholar "Our Lady of Christ's College." And from youth, the poet devoted himself to what he only got around to accomplishing in the last decades of his life: writing a sacred epic that reconciles the course of divine history with a journey of the solitary soul.

In the last 15 years of his life, Milton openly proclaimed himself an anointed prophet. It was 2,000 years after the destruction of Solomon's Temple, when prophecy ceased in Israel. The pagan oracles fell silent at Jesus' birth. Such large claims, and his conviction that he possessed an upright and pure heart, however honestly come by, do nothing to soften resistance. The man and his works seem indissoluble, with the density and gravity of matter.

The pressure of speaking about events and forces prior to language required Milton to straddle both sides, to admit the impossibility of what he attempted and still do it. He includes everything he knows, throws everything into his poems, everything he can remember. Memory is the mother of the Muses.

In 1673, one year before his death, Milton added his translation from the Latin of "The Fifth Ode of Horace, Book I" to the last edition of his minor poems. Here's the whole thing:

What slender Youth bedew'd with liquid odours
Courts thee on Roses in some pleasant Cave,
Pyrrha for whom bindst thou In wreaths thy golden Hair,
Plain in thy neatness; O how oft shall he
On Faith and changed Gods complain: and Seas
Rough with black winds and storms
Unwonted shall admire:
Who now enjoyes thee credulous, all Gold,
Who always vacant, always amiable Hopes thee; of flattering gales
Unmindfull. Hapless they
To whom thou untry'd seem'st fair. Me in my vow'd
Picture the sacred wall declares t' have hung
My dank and dropping weeds
To the stern God of Sea.

The first half of this 16-line poem asks a series of questions without question marks:

What slender Youth bedew'd with liquid odours / Courts thee . . .; O how oft shall he / . . . complain; the "thee" being Pyrrha, erotic other with golden hair.

But the thought doesn't stop there. Milton's sentence continues through line 12: *Who now enjoys thee . . . / Who alwayes vacant, alwayes amiable / Hopes thee . . .*

Depending on where the reade stresses the "whos," *who* can be heard as "he who," enjoying present bliss, or as "who?" the poet remembering love now disenchanted. This cuts-both-ways/all-purpose love lyric (in English) belongs to the same tradition as Ben Jonson's tavern song with Latin roots, "To Celia" (*Drink to me, onely, with thine eyes*) which can be delivered, depending on where the stress falls, as a blessing or a curse.

Up to line 12, the ode is a comrade also to the urbane, disenchanted John Donne of "*Go, and catch a falling star . . .*"

But where men of tarnished hopes distance themselves through knowingness or doubleness or irony, Milton's lover takes a different turn: *Hapless they / To whom thou untry'd seemst fair*. Pyrrha's beauty, real or illusive, must be tried, or nothing happens: no desire, guilt, or virtue.

I have no idea about the last sentence, those last four lines, which I can't parse, or assemble, yet unnerve me nonetheless. ♦

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Seeing Red

Happy, productive peasants can't be wrong: Socialist Realism lives! **BY KATHERINE EASTLAND**

'Strive Forward in Wind and Tides' (1971)

EDDIE C. Y. LAM / IMAGE ART STUDIO

At the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, Mao Zedong declared that "in our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people . . . there are the fronts of the pen and of the gun." In addition to these fronts, he exploited another in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976: the paint brush. Mao understood, in all his terrifying genius, that a necessary part of changing a culture is changing its art.

During China's Mao era—roughly the three decades following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949—much art was made either within or outside Mao's imperative that art serve his politics. Yet little of this art has entered the public square; and what has—mostly the large paintings of Mao with happy peasants fawning at his side—has been quickly dismissed as propaganda.

Art and China's Revolution
Through January 11
The New York Asia Society

The New York Asia Society believes that this art warrants a second look, both for its aesthetic merit and for its legacy. As the contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing notes, "If you want to probe deeply into the underpinnings of contemporary Chinese art, you have to consider the influence of the Cultural Revolution on my generation because it was an entirely unique experience." Which makes sense, since these artists grew up in the endless parade of Mao's face. One painting alone—Liu Chunhua's "Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan" (1969)—was reprinted, by some estimates, 900 million times.

Understanding the significance of the era, cocurators Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian have spent five years preparing this landmark exhibition. On view are over 250 works, many of which have never been exhibited in the United States, or exhibited at all. Though these 250 works, ranging from prints to paintings to sculptures, cover the many facets of Maoist art, more would have been on view had the Ministry of Culture in Beijing not frustrated the society's plans to exhibit 100 Mao-related works which have been sitting in storage (and without public access) in Chinese galleries for decades. The Chinese refusal to grant the necessary loan permits is a blatant attempt to censor a show on a subject the Ministry of Culture deems too sensitive for discussion—or disagreement.

As Chiu and Zheng know too well, "Art and China's Revolution" is a show that could not happen in China today. They were told, unofficially, by Chinese officials that the ministry refused the permits because of the show's timing. The opening date was uncomfortably close to the Olympics, a time for China to impress the world as a formidable, forward-looking nation. Reminding that same global audience—and in the cultural capital of the United States, no less—of China's stained past was something the Ministry of Culture had no desire to endorse. And yet, of course, their decision had the opposite effect: It just made China look worse.

The New York Asia Society, it must be noted, is not a museum. It has a permanent collection of art, and rooms for special exhibitions; but it is primarily a "nonpartisan, nonprofit educational institution" with offices here and across Asia designed to "enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts, and culture." And so it makes sense that the Asia Society would put on a show whose temper is academic, careful, reserved—and above all, diplomatic.

Mao's misdeeds aren't belabored here. The focus isn't even on him;

Katherine Eastland is an assistant editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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it's on art itself and the artists who clocked in the hours to make it. To illustrate that important shift in focus, Chiu and Zheng arranged for six of the artists appearing in the show to answer questions and tell stories at a press preview. In so doing, they could prove that they painted in more than Communist red and that their work transcends "propaganda." As Zheng told us, "I want you to see beyond propaganda, to see the lives of artists. That is our hope."

It's according to that hope that he and Chiu arranged the works. The first rooms address Mao directly, as if he were a hill to climb so that the rest of the show can proceed downhill. Here the visitor finds a wealth of Mao memorabilia: Mao magazines and newspapers and Little Red Books, including one blue-jacketed copy from the 1964 trial edition; vases printed with slogans such as "Bombard the headquarters, my big-character poster!"; medallions and buttons plastered with Mao's face; teacups and teapots emblazoned with scenes from revolutionary ballets such as *The Red Detachment of Women*; red matchboxes and cigarette packs featuring cartoon soldiers; and even one commemorative glass mango, revered as a modern relic and symbol of Mao-thought.

All these items are impersonal, mass-produced. The next room, still inundated with Mao's iconic image, introduces us to artists. Here hang floor-to-ceiling some of the giant, illustrative oil paintings rendered in the Soviet Socialist Realist style and touted as "model" works for following Mao's precepts: that art be *hong*, *guang*, *liang* (red, bright, shining) and *gao*, *da*, *quan* (lofty, grand, complete).

Mao stands tallest in each—in 1958 he lamented that an artist had dared to paint him shorter than Stalin—and at the center, always smiling. Others depict him alone, bordering on godhood amid wispy clouds. The works remain mask-like, a film of highly polished myth in which one thought reigns: Long Live Chairman Mao! There is an artist who made the work, but he can't be found beneath the thick layer of Mao.

It is in the next section that Chiu and Zheng place works to chip away at that layer. Notably, Mao isn't to be found: The images are taken from the observed world, such as a crane poised in dark underbrush, a snowscape, skull, orchid, or peasant. These works were made by older artists whom the Red Guards persecuted, subjected to physical and mental torture, and labeled "black" (like the Nazi epithet "degenerate") for working in the old custom of ink painting; or by younger artists who forsook Mao and joined the secret No Name Group, founded in the early 1960s for the study of European Modernist styles. Other works in the section are by young artists who went to the countryside in Mao's name to "enter deeply into life" for "reeducation" among peasants instead of among "intellectual, bourgeois" professors.

Sui Jianguo with one of his Mao jackets

Just before the exit there's a collection of small studies of peasants rendered in cheap oil paint on cheap paper—sometimes magazine pages, which buckle under the weight and greasiness of oil. But it is their imperfection that gets to the marrow of this exhibition: In these simple studies, the artist expresses affection for his people.

Such affection is what the visiting artists kept returning to, not the injustices they suffered under Mao. (Zheng was imprisoned in a cowshed where he and others labeled "intellectual bourgeois amenable to reform" were placed for intense sessions of "self-correction" and public criticism.) For Zheng and the six, it is preferable to present themselves as artists, not victims, and their work as art, not propaganda.

But there is an irony here, for "Art and China's Revolution" asks the visitor to divorce art from politics when Mao had rallied for the exact opposite. "What we demand," he said, "is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form." It's dangerous to forget Mao's imperative for ideological purity in art, for it is to see the art not as it truly is.

The show's last component was installed on the Park Avenue median on 70th Street, right outside the Asia Society building, soon after the show had opened. It's a 10-foot tall steel sculpture of a Mao jacket, standing upright and bodyless on its bottom hem. The right sleeve is raised slightly, as if about to acknowledge the visitor, and it's as if Mao's ghost were in there, keeping mum inside that massive steel husk. Like the other works nestled inside the gallery, this sculpture presents the persistent fact that China's artists are still wrestling with Mao Zedong. They are caught, in the words of the catalogue, somewhere between "criticism and nostalgia." ♦

CHRISTOPHE CALAIS / CORBIS

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He Saw the Future

From poet to propagandist in Bolshevik Russia.

BY MICHAEL MCDONALD

The Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky was born in 1893 in Baghdati, Georgia, and committed suicide in 1930 in Moscow. Tall and handsome, with the physical build of a boxer and a mesmerizing bass voice, he displayed an aggressive impatience with stale conventions and the complacent realities of everyday existence—what the Russians call *byt*—propelled him to embrace life unconditionally and fully charged. In the less than 37 years he lived—"tantrumed" was his own, better way, of describing it—he achieved lasting international notoriety, first as one of the leaders of the literary movement known as Russian Futurism, and then, in the words of the Russian historian Richard Stites, as the "irrepressible bard of the Russian Revolution."

Night Wraps the Sky
Writing by and about Mayakovsky
by Vladimir Mayakovsky
edited by Michael Almereyda
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux,
304 pp., $27

Mayakovsky's rise to fame was due, in no small part, to his good fortune in living in a period and in a place that proved fully receptive to his furies and fulminations. Protest, revolt, and the violent overthrow of the "old world" of fixed and hallowed forms: these were the qualities that characterized the two intimately related spheres of Mayakovsky's life and poetry. They also happened to define the political passions tearing apart czarist Russia in the first two decades of the 20th century.

Were a man and his time ever more perfectly matched? And yet he chose to kill himself. There is an almost Dostoyevskian drama to Mayakovsky's life, which renders it endlessly fascinating and helps explain why it has escaped the narrow confines of graduate seminars to engage a much wider audience.

Edward J. Brown's *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution* (1973) was the first (and best) full-length English-language biography to appear in print. But many others have followed. Mayakovsky's extraordinary affair with Lili Brik, the woman Pablo Neruda called "the muse of the Russian Revolution," has spawned collections of their correspondence and separate editions of his great love poems to her:

> *Besides your love,*
> *I have*
> *no sun,*
> *and I don't know where you are, or who you're with.*
> *If you had tortured a poet like this,*
> *he would*
> *trade in his beloved for money and fame,*
> *but for me*
> *not a single sound brings me joy*
> *but the ring of your lovely name.*
> *I won't throw myself down a stairwell,*
> *or drink poison,*
> *or pull the trigger on the gun pressed to my temple.*
> *Besides your sharpened gaze*
> *the blade of any other knife is powerless.*
>
> *"Lilichka!" (1916)*

Then there are all those popular historians of the Revolution. As they look to explain what went wrong with the utopian project to create the new socialist man in the wake of Stalin's ascension to power in 1928, they invariably pause to linger over Mayakovsky's suicide two years later: "One of those rare acts of definition in history," as the Russian literary critic Patricia Blake wrote, "which strips clean a whole era, and mercilessly lays open the future."

Michael Almereyda is the most recent person to grapple with the Russian poet's legacy in *Night Wraps the Sky*, which Almereyda himself describes as a "patchwork" book. It consists of some carefully selected poems by Mayakovsky (about which more later) in lively new translations by young Russian-American poets, together with selections from Mayakovsky's 1922 autobiography *I, Myself*, memoirs and artistic appreciations from other poets and writers, as well as eyewitness accounts of Mayakovsky's life and times.

If you happen to have seen any of his movies—especially either of his two recent documentaries, one dealing with the production of a Sam Shepard play, the other examining the artistry of the photographer William Eggleston—you'll know that Almereyda is an intelligent and nuanced artist himself, with a well-developed literary sensibility. This comes through quite clearly in the various mini-essays he contributes to this book, particularly an affecting piece near the end in which he describes a visit he took in 2004 to the Mayakovsky Museum in Moscow. The museum is something of a hodge-podge of "hectic displays" made up of posters, papers, photographs, and other artifacts, all jostling for the visitor's attention. As Almereyda surveys the clutter he perceptively notes that

> the dustbin of history is overflowing with Soviet-era aesthetic debris of this approximate sort, but among monuments to great writers, is there anything quite like the Mayakovsky Museum? Its ostentatious lack of sobriety, its atmosphere of aggressive self-congratulation, even its dinginess, are magnificent. If nothing else, the place provides a sort of clearinghouse for the poet's outsize contradictions, a chaotic stage set framing a drama whose central actor plays all the parts but who has, in room after room, fled the scene.

If it should seem odd that a contemporary American filmmaker would be attracted to an early 20th century Russian poet, perhaps it has something to do with Mayakovsky's own work in film both as an actor and as the author of more than 30 screenplays. Certainly,

Michael McDonald, a lawyer and writer in Washington, is at work on a biography of Curzio Malaparte, the Italian novelist and diplomat.

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Almereyda seems captivated by the cinematic aspects of Mayakovsky's poetry: the rapid-fire transitions and jump cuts, the close-up focus on physical details, and the mobility of viewpoints.

Whatever the reasons, he clearly feels an affinity with the poet—"For this reader," Almereyda writes, "Mayakovsky remains extraordinarily human, and his best poetry has stayed fascinating and urgent"—and this book succeeds brilliantly and better than any other work on Mayakovsky that I know in bringing him to life. For this reason, it is safe to predict that Almereyda's book will wind up on college and university reading lists as part of the standard introduction to Mayakovsky in courses dealing with modern Russian poetry.

Whether this would be an unalloyed good is, however, debatable. I say this, notwithstanding my admiration of Almereyda's achievement, for two reasons. The first has to do with Almereyda's editorial decision—about which he is quite candid—to "veer away from" reproducing any of Mayakovsky's agitprop poems, which comprise a large part of his poetic production.

The second has to do with Almereyda's rather benign view of Mayakovsky's life and politics. Almereyda writes that just as "hindsight grants a blood-soaked historical view of the Revolution's final costs . . . Mayakovsky's bluntest propaganda now feel starkly hollow, unconvincing, and coarse." That is true, but there was no need of hindsight to understand the Revolution's costs in lives lost or the vacuity of the verse Mayakovsky churned out in celebration of its destructiveness. Contemporary witnesses abounded.

To say that Mayakovsky was a born malcontent and troublemaker may be a bit of an overstatement, but just barely. At the time of the 1905 revolution, while he was still in his early teens, he was leading his classmates in revolutionary demonstrations. Less than two years later, after being expelled from school, he was in Moscow, having joined an underground revolutionary group. By the time he was 15 he had been arrested three times and spent seven months in prison. It was during the time he spent in prison, much of it in solitary confinement, that he developed a taste for reading and formed, however vaguely, the idea of becoming an artist.

Released from prison, Mayakovsky drifted away from direct socialist agitation and, in 1911, into circles affiliated with the Moscow Art School. It was here that he first realized his artistic aspirations by joining with a painter and two other poets to write "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (1912), the founding document of the Russian Futurist movement.

Vladimir Mayakovsky

Russian Futurism had more than a few things in common with Italian Futurism, launched by F.T. Marinetti in 1909: an adolescent need to provoke and outrage bourgeois values, a rejection of tradition, an infatuation with new technology (machines, speed) and—of course, given that "slap"—a love of violence. Indeed, assertive crudeness was such a hallmark of Russian Futurism that Marinetti, who visited Russia in 1914, called it "not Futurism, but Savage-ism."

My poems do not powder
the ears
or nibble
The earlobes
of some pretty young girl.
Shit no! My poems
jump out
like mad gladiators.
"Kill!"
they cry.
Hand to hand
and head to head!
And the words fly out
like bullets
exploding
In your brain.
You see!
I'm giving it all away,
everything to you,
Workers of the world.
Any friend of yours
is a friend of mine,
too bad for the rest!

These lines of verse, nicely translated from the Russian by Ron Padgett, appear in a poem entitled "Screaming My Head Off" that Mayakovsky wrote in 1930. But they perfectly convey what he was all about from the very start of his career to the bitter end. He took liberties in graphic layout, brought the coarse language of the streets to Russian poetry through crude and angular rhythms, and gave voice to his passions and frustrations in loud, extravagant, and hectoring hyperbole.

Mayakovsky threw himself with undisguised delight into the Futurist project to mock the past and to reinvent poetic language so as to transform perception and thereby create a new social environment. He traveled widely throughout Russia, declaiming his verse. And he was never so happy as when the bourgeois public that went to see him "hissed holes," as he would later proudly recount, in his performances.

In 1915 Mayakovsky wrote his most famous Futurist poem, "A Cloud in Pants," an agitated view of love and revolution. As rendered into English by Matvei Yankelevich, its opening lines go like this:

I'll tease your thought
on the blood-soaked shred of a heart
as it daydreams on a brain beaten to softness
like a blown-out intern on a grease-stained sofa.
Cocky and caustic, I'll mock you till I've had enough.

Not a single strand of gray streaks the hair of my soul,
there's no old-fogy tenderness in me!
The might of my voice shakes up the world
as I walk, a beautiful
twenty-two-year old.

BETTMANN / CORBIS

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Mayakovsky, *pace* Auden, believed not only that poetry "makes things happen" but that it possesses the power to "hurry time forward." It is difficult not to admire his early faith and zeal. But in time the battle against *byt* turned progressively nasty, doctrinaire, and intolerant. To be sure, fanaticism in the attempt to force feed Futurist poetry to an unwilling public is nothing to become worried about. But fanaticism when genuine political revolution and social upheaval are at hand is something altogether different.

The contempt for bourgeois values and liberal democracy that European avant-garde movements expressed was as thick in the air as oxygen in the run-up to the First World War. In its wake, the Italian Futurists would enthusiastically embrace Mussolini and Fascism, while in Russia Futurists like Mayakovsky would opt for their home-grown totalitarian products: Lenin and Bolshevism.

When the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in 1917, Mayakovsky, the alienated rebel, finally felt at peace in the surrounding chaos. As his friend, the critic Viktor Shklovsky, memorably remarked: "Mayakovsky entered the Revolution as he would enter his own home." He willingly submerged, as best he could, his private, anarchic, and elitist proclivities to assume an engaged, ideological, and political stance of unremitting support for the goals of the Soviet state. Almereyda characterizes Mayakovsky's metamorphosis, in part, as a transition from "smart-ass cultural iconoclasm" to "a seething political conscience." But this characterization is overly generous.

Far from exhibiting "a seething political conscience" in the poetry he produced after 1917, most of which was political in nature, he simply did as he was told, writing propaganda poems on demand. In Mayakovsky's own words: *I feel I am / a Soviet factory / producing happiness*—"happiness," that is, as defined by the party. He worked for the Russian State Telegraph Agency, creating agitprop posters and slogans that urged Soviet citizens to drink boiled water, buy state-sponsored cigarettes, and patronize the Moscow state-run department store Mosselprom.

A year after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Mayakovsky also wrote a play to celebrate the coup, entitled *Mystery-Bouffe*. The hisses he had long cherished now turned into loud cheers, which he cherished even more. He had become a popular idol. During the first terrible years of the Revolution, as many distinguished Russian intellectuals and writers fled abroad to escape the political repercussions of their failure to align themselves with the Bolsheviks, and as ordinary Russians were suffering the agony of civil war, Mayakovsky, in the words of Patricia Blake, was "exultant."

The other major poets of the day—Pasternak, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, Esenin—were appalled at Mayakovsky's decision to turn from producing splendid lyrics to agitprop that was little better than doggerel. Victor Serge would later write:

> He wasted his best talents in a wary quest for God knows what ideological line, demanded of him by petty pedants who made a living out of it. Having become the most-requested rhymester of hack journalism, he allowed his personality to be sacrificed to this daily drudgery.

But Mayakovsky, who soon began to enjoy the comforts of wealth and patronage that follow from cozying up to power, didn't mind. He would travel abroad in first class as the poster boy for the Revolution and have his suits custom-made in Paris.

Almereyda recognizes that Mayakovsky became "a Soviet mascot and a shill." He is far from idolizing Mayakovsky, as some leftist critics have done. He also has little patience for postmodernist critics who want to deconstruct Mayakovsky agitprop jingles and blatantly political poetry in such a way as to suggest that he was being ironic or he was subtly scoring points against the "capitalist errors" that were "deforming" the path to true socialism.

But the picture Almereyda paints of Mayakovsky is still deficient. The gallery of witnesses whom Almereyda quotes to testify to Mayakovsky's character is notably one-sided. The Nobel Prize winner Ivan Bunin is among the missing. Bunin spoke for many when he wrote that Mayakovsky reveled in luxury and fame while the Russian people fed on corpses.

Almereyda contends that things began to turn bad for Mayakovsky when Lenin died in 1924—and that the poet's downfall accelerated after Trotsky was exiled in 1928 and Stalin took over. That is, a new orthodoxy became established in 1928 that put an end to experimentation and freedom of expression.

But this is wrongheaded for any number of reasons. First, censorship of artists was alive and well throughout the 1920s in Russia. (As Isaiah Berlin wrote, "The only period of freedom during which no censorship existed in modern Russia was from February to October 1917.") Second, the whole notion of a contrast between the "good" Lenin and the "bad" Stalin is suspect. As Robert Service noted near the end of his authoritative biography of Lenin:

> Lenin's ideas on violence, dictatorship, terror, centralism, hierarchy and leadership were integral to Stalin's thinking. Furthermore, Lenin had bequeathed the terroristic instrumentalities to his successor: the Cheka, the forced labor-camps, the one-party state, the mono-ideological mass media, the legalized administrative arbitrariness, the prohibition of free and popular elections, the ban on internal party dissent.

Near the end of the 1920s Mayakovsky certainly became disillusioned with his life. Still, remorse may not account for his suicide, as Almereyda supposes. The explanation may instead be simpler. As the first lines quoted here reveal, he had thoughts of poetic martyrdom from the start.

Almereyda says that Mayakovsky will continue to speak to new readers, because his poetry points to a bridge between freedom and responsibility. But Mayakovsky's behavior itself was irresponsible. The illusion of a "radiant future" was as necessary as physical coercion to keep Lenin's party in power for 74 years—and Mayakovsky willingly abused his enormous talents to help supply the illusion. Almereyda narrates the episodes of Mayakovsky's life agreeably and well. But he never attempts to pose, let alone answer, the tough questions. ♦

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God's Politics

Is religion a menace, or an asset, to the American experiment? **BY JOSEPH KNIPPENBERG**

It's hard to have a conversation or argument about religion and politics in America without dragging history into it. At the very least, many of us feel compelled to invoke the Founders on behalf of a vision of America either as some sort of "Christian nation" or as the first and most successful secular republic.

In his brief but generally judicious *Religion in American Politics*, Purdue historian Frank Lambert demonstrates that this is nothing new: Proponents of both visions have been arguing back and forth since the time of the founding. Since his is a "short history," Lambert doesn't exhaustively document every intersection of religion and politics. Rather, he picks his moments, showing how they reveal particular versions of our hardy perennial debate.

Religion in American Politics
A Short History
by Frank Lambert
Princeton, 304 pp., $24.95

Thus he tells us about the founding era, the debate over Sunday mail delivery in the early Republic, the inevitable conflicts over slavery, different late-19th-century religious responses to industrialization, the early-20th-century battle between modernists and fundamentalists over the authority of science, the rise of religious and political liberalism in the middle of the 20th century, the civil rights movement, the rise of the religious right, and the apparent resurgence of the religious left in the aftermath of George W. Bush's reelection in 2004.

Of course, it's hard to examine the history without drawing some lessons. Lambert's two principal arguments are that religious groups on both the right and the left have sought to impose upon the country "a national religious establishment, or, more specifically, a *Christian* civil religion," and that every religious claim has been and will be contested, by other religious groups, by secularists, or by both. These considerations, he says, point to the wisdom of the Founders, who sought "to keep religion out of national politics."

Stated thus baldly, this slight book would seem to yield slight—and not particularly interesting—results. *Of course*, religious claims are contestable. But so is *any* claim anyone makes in political life. Lambert would have to argue, in addition, that religious claims are somehow different—more absolute, less open to negotiation, and hence more likely to lead to irreconcilable conflict. The spectre of the English Civil War looms on the horizon, with blood spilling everywhere as mainline Cavaliers line up against evangelical Roundheads.

But Lambert's own history seems to suggest another possibility. Yes, religiously inspired claims in the public square are contested, but bloodshed isn't inevitably the result. Sometimes the religionists take a lickin' and keep on tickin'—as the old Timex ad would have it. Sometimes they withdraw to the sidelines for a time and establish a "counterculture," as conservative Protestants did after winning the battle of Dayton, Tennessee, and losing the larger war over science in which it was but a skirmish.

Our culture wars, in other words, have most frequently been wars solely in the metaphorical sense. In America, vigorous debate, even vigorous religious debate, isn't always, or even often, accompanied or followed by violence.

There's another lesson here, one that I wish Lambert had drawn more explicitly. It is that however incontestable or nonnegotiable the fundamental religious precepts are, the political claims that derive from them are much more matters of fallible human prudence. God may tell us not to murder, but we're still left to decide which sorts of killing amount to murder. The religious men and women who intervene in debates over the justice of a war, of capital punishment, or of abortion should know or must learn that there's some distance to be traversed between even a clear and categorical "thus sayeth the Lord" and any law or public policy based upon it.

To recognize this distance is to become a little less categorical and a little more humble in one's pronouncements, to engage with one's adversaries in such a way as not to foreclose the possibility that, in the future, they may be allies. But because he's so wed to his attempt to encourage religion to stay out of politics, Lambert all too frequently forgoes this teachable moment. That's too bad, because his entire narrative leads one to conclude—correctly—that religious people can't and won't stay away from the public square.

Lambert's wishful thinking about separating religion from politics also leads him to oversimplify his other lesson. For one thing, there's a gap between a "national religious establishment" and a "Christian civil religion." Clearly forbidden by the First Amendment, the former involves exclusive formal legal preferences for a particular religion or denomination.

By contrast, the latter is promoted and propagated by informal means, and embodied in the way people think and talk about moral and political questions. If we talk about America as a city on a hill, or refer to ourselves as our brother's keepers, we're using the language of the Book and calling upon a Judeo-Christian civil religion of a sort. To forgo this is to impoverish our political discourse, to wish to forget the language that men like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Ronald Reagan, and, yes, even George W. Bush used to good effect.

Lambert would prefer to reserve the language of civil religion for what he calls "America's scriptures—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and

Joseph Knippenberg is professor of politics and director of the Rich Foundation Urban Leadership Program at Oglethorpe University.

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the Bill of Rights" whose provenance owes more (he rightly argues) to the Enlightenment and classical republican traditions than directly to Christianity.

He concedes, however, that the institutions inspired by these documents require a decent citizenry and that, for a long time, many people expected Christianity to provide that. One might say that our institutions presupposed a "merely Christian" moral framework, one that emphasized the moral precepts that most great traditions have in common. While Lambert occasionally seems to argue that religion simply serves to "threaten liberty" or "restrict choice," a more nuanced argument would at least sketch the ways in which self-government depends upon government of the self, not to mention the ways in which the latter is fostered by religious faith.

It would be misleading to say that Lambert is simply hostile to the role religion plays or has played in the public square. He treats the civil rights movement quite favorably, for example. But he does like to emphasize the divisive character of religious arguments, not to mention the anti-intellectualism of some forms of traditional religion.

His own political sympathies (or rather aversions) come most obviously to the surface in his treatment of the contemporary religious right and the president—George W. Bush—most closely identified with it. Indeed, Lambert's portrait of Bush's faith-based initiative borders on caricature. Asserting that the expression "faith-based" is intended to exclude, he omits to mention that the Bush administration officially and routinely refers to it as the faith-based *and community* initiative.

Despite intense and assiduous efforts at outreach—often to urban churches that aren't exactly populated by ardent supporters of the president—Lambert suggests that the Bush administration largely intended the funds associated with the initiative to reward its supporters.

Finally, he repeats without challenge or qualification the separationist canard that the administration's support for religious hiring rights amounts simply to support of federally funded discrimination. In so doing, he fails to note that the first piece of legislation affirming that government contractors could enjoy these rights was signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996.

This recitation of Lambert's exaggerations might seem to give the lie to my opening observation that his account is generally judicious. It is. He usually tries to tell both (or rather all) the sides of a story and, within the limits imposed by his brevity, to let the protagonists speak for themselves. And despite the conclusion he would like his readers to draw, he provides ample evidence for those who would disagree with him.

In other words, as a brief introduction to the interventions of religious figures and movements in American politics, this volume is useful. It provides a summary narrative and lots of references for further examination. Those who, for example, believe that the religious right poses (or posed) an unprecedented threat to our liberties couldn't read this book without coming to the conclusion that, at the very least, morally and theologically conservative leaders and movements have been hardy perennials on the American scene. They would also be forced to confront an argument that religious conservatives aren't the only ones who have sought to influence our public debate. Today's (somewhat) resurgent religious left also has prominent historical antecedents.

As I noted earlier, Lambert wants his to be a cautionary tale. But the lesson he ultimately teaches isn't the one he intends. Yes, religious movements have always been around. Yes, there has been some conflict associated with them—just as there has been with secular movements. But the republic has survived, and religion has continued to thrive.

Rather than embark with Lambert upon the nigh-unto-impossible task of persuading religious folk to keep their views out of the public square, let's have a more productive conversation about the responsibilities attending prophetic witness and the roles of prudence and good information in assuring that the religious voice gets a respectful hearing. Against his explicit intentions, this is a conversation in which Frank Lambert's contribution would be most welcome. ♦

Man on the Brink

Nine decades since 'The Education,' a look back at Henry Adams. **BY PATRICK J. WALSH**

At the Massachusetts Historical Society's library, an American classic lies open before me: Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams*, privately printed in 1907. A century ago Adams sent copies of this text to his close friends for comment. This edition belonged to Henry Adams. In the margins, neatly handwritten, are his notes for a corrected version never published in his lifetime. The *Education* was published in 1918, after Adams' death, by the Massachusetts Historical Society, and won a Pulitzer Prize.

A companion book to the *Education*, also privately published (in 1904), is *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, Adams called it "a study of Thirteenth-Century Unity." Unlike the leaders of the European Union, Henry Adams understood that "Europe was a unity then, in thought, will, and object. Christianity was the unit." His *Education* juxtaposed this unity with what he called "Twentieth-Century Multiplicity." Adams held the chaotic disunity of his time responsible for what he regarded as a life of failure, and explained the private printing in a letter: "I stopped publishing books twenty years ago

Patrick J. Walsh is a writer in Quincy, Massachusetts.

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because I could not induce anybody to show the least interest in them."

Henry Adams was a great writer, and one of America's preeminent historians, author of *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, *John Randolph*, and his magisterial *History of the United States during the Administration of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*. He also wrote political novels still well worth reading, *Democracy* and *Esther*.

Of course, Adams (1838-1918) descended from a prestigious pedigree. His father, Charles Francis Adams, was the son of our sixth president, John Quincy Adams, who in turn was the son of the illustrious John Adams. Henry attended Harvard and after graduation in 1858 departed for Germany to study civil law. President Lincoln appointed Charles Francis Adams to serve as Minister to Britain during the Civil War and Henry served his father as an unofficial, unpaid private secretary during 1861-68.

Returning to America after nearly a decade, Henry Adams found the country changed. A great mechanical revolution had occurred, transferring power to "coal, iron and steam," usurping the older order of "agriculture, handwork and learning." Still, at 30, Adams hoped to offer his talents in public service for government reform. But the Grant administration's "policy of drift" ended such plans, and a thoroughly disappointed idealist, Adams now believed "the system of 1789 had broken down and with it the 18th-century fabric of *a priori*, or moral principles."

> A traveler in the highways of history looked out of a club window on the turmoil of Fifth Avenue and felt himself in Rome, under Diocletian, witnessing the anarchy, conscious of the compulsion, eager for the solution, but unable to conceive whence the next impulse was to come or how it was to act. The two-thousand year failure of Christianity roared upward from Broadway, and no Constantine the Great was in sight.

Still a young man, Adams found himself out of place in this new world and labeled himself a "relic of the eighteenth century." Offered an assistant professorship of medieval history at Harvard in 1870, he left Washington for Cambridge where he also assumed the editorship of the *North American Review*. In 1872 he married the erratic Marian Hooper and, though childless, their 10-year marriage gave birth to his histories and novels, and were the most fruitful years of Adams's life.

Disenchanted with the gilded American present, Adams turned to the American past. John Lukacs says of his *History of the United States during the Administration of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* that, in "literary judgment and a quality of style," it is "probably without equal in the writings of American historians." Adams had sympathy for Jefferson—not because of bitterness against his own Federalist ancestors, or because Adams was "an honorary Southerner" or furtive Jeffersonian Republican (as Garry Wills imagines in *Henry Adams and the Making of America*)—but because Adams satirizes the utterly impractical *visionary* policies of Jefferson and Madison, narrating the demise of Jeffersonian Republicanism. Jefferson's purchase of Louisiana in 1804 destroyed the Republican tenet of a "strict construction" of the Constitution, and his embargo actually curtailed liberty, along with property rights, while investing government with what his own Treasury secretary, Albert Gallatin, called "the most arbitrary powers."

Yet Adams identified with Jefferson the failed idealist. He felt himself just as helpless as Jefferson the "grasshopper" against the chaotic, impersonal forces of history. Adams's pessimism about any providential purpose in history soon led to his giving up writing history altogether, especially as his mind had become entrapped in abstract deterministic theories of history. In 1884, halfway through his history of Jefferson's presidency, Adams wrote to another master historian, Francis Parkman, that he was convinced that a new scientific "school of history would leave us antiquated" and that the other sciences would prove man to be like a "tree and almost as unconscious."

Johns Adams, Henry's great-grandfather, would have scoffed at such a *philosophe* reduction of man!

A year later Adams's wife, an accomplished photographer, killed herself at their home in Washington by swallowing chemicals used for developing photographs. Adams commissioned his friend Augustus Saint-Gaudens to sculpt a monument over her grave in Rock Creek Cemetery, and Saint-Gaudens responded by creating a masterwork of American art. Adams never mentions his wife in the *Education*. Taking to world travel "he had become estray, a flotsam or jetsam of wreckage."

Henry Adams believed that the 20th century triumph of capitalism, science, and technology negated the humanity of human beings, and warned that modernity was en route to a cataclysmic collapse: "Religion, art, politics, manners are either vulgarized or dead or turned into moneymaking agencies. Every country is a variation of the same theme," he wrote.

But in *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* he expressed a longing beyond the ache of modernity: ennui. All his scientific determinism and theorizing about historical materialism yielded discontentment. This "Conservative, Christian, Anarchist" sought a graceful synthesis of the past and present which would connect man with the eternal and give human life some meaning. He entered the ancient cathedrals of France but was incapable of bowing at the knee: "There the contrite sinner was welcomed with such tenderness as to make me still wish I were one."

The tragedy of Henry Adams, wrote Paul Elmer More, "is that of a man who could not rest in negation, yet could find no positive faith to take its place." The faith of his "people had passed from Calvinism to Unitarianism, and from this to free thinking, until in the days of our Adams there was little left to the intellect but a great denial."

Denial may not be the final word. When he died in 1918 a poem entitled "A Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres" was found in Adams' wallet. Our Lady may well have looked down with pity on his soul, as she had on others who had made the pilgrimage to her shrine at Chartres. Perhaps Henry Adams, the unhappy son of New England Puritanism, opened his heart and was, in the end, surprised by joy. ♦

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Small Is Beautiful

You lose some effects, but keep the story, in portable moviegoing. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

For a while, movie theaters were getting better. After decades in which the grand palaces were either allowed to run down into rot or torn down entirely, while new venues were slapped together in strip malls and configured in odd and distressing shapes, companies like Cineplex Odeon and National Amusements went on building sprees. They designed lavish multiplexes with beautiful lobbies, decent sound systems, and chairs that rocked.

Building led to overbuilding. The Second Golden Age of the Movie Palace came to an end in 2005. And now, 20 years after the beginning of the construction boom, there are signs of creeping decrepitude. Screens are fraying and graying. Comfortable seats are lumpy and getting lumpier. The sound, once crisp, is now merely loud.

Theater owners trumpet the arrival of digital projection to lure customers, but it turns out that digital projection is more valuable for the industry than it is for the viewer. Studios will not have to produce costly prints on film, which is nice for them, but the picture on display is nowhere near as sharp.

So what is a movie watcher to do? The obvious answer is to stay home, where the qualitative improvements—plasma and LCD televisions up to eight feet wide, with remarkable sound and picture—are far more transformative than the changes to theaters. But if one is not at home, and is tired of getting seasick in a broken movie theater rocker, there is the third option, and the only one that is entirely new. Call it portable moviegoing.

I have spent the last two years watching movies on treadmills and Stairmasters, subways and buses, and in a queue at the Motor Vehicles Bureau or an airport security line on a video iPod I received as a birthday present from my wife. At the time the device made its debut, it was the subject of loud howls from *cinéastes* and movie directors, who described it as the death of cinema. Moviemakers labor for hours to get the look of a scene exactly right, and all that effort would surely be lost at a width of two inches and a height of an inch-and-a-half.

And it is. But the lack of visual scale certainly did not prevent those of us who grew up watching black-and-white televisions, the smaller versions of which had screens five inches in diagonal and the broadcast quality of whose images was often wretched, from falling in love with movies. We did not have a color television in our house until 1970, which meant that before then I had no idea, during the five times I saw *The Wizard of Oz* in its annual broadcast, that Kansas was in black-and-white while Oz was in color. Which did not save me from suffering through flying-monkey nightmares, or my siblings from suffering through my pained efforts to mimic the dulcet sounds of the Lollipop Guild.

The iPod is vastly superior to the old portable black-and-white television, needless to say. The sound is extraordinary and the picture is beautiful to look at. (I gather the picture is better and larger on the iPhone.) As always, what matters most is not the peripheral issues of a film—the color palette of its cinematography, the whizbang special effects, the editing—but the essentials of story, character, and dialogue. If those work, the movie works, at 40 feet wide or at two inches wide.

What is defiantly peculiar about the experience of watching a movie on the iPod has far less to do with the minuscule size of the screen than the fact that one rarely watches it from a fixed vantage point. The iPod is something one carries, after all, and that means even in the time it takes for a blink or a quick eye rub, the background will shift, even a tiny bit. That can pull you out of the story you're watching. The peerless advantage of watching a movie in a dark theater is that, assuming there isn't a teenager texting right next to you, there is nothing extraneous to distract your attention.

Which brings up an odd advantage. Say you're watching a bad or boring movie on a subway train, a movie you nonetheless want to get to the end of. A distraction or two is not a bad thing; the movie turns into a radio show for a moment as you survey the other passengers. And if a homeless guy comes through asking you to help him in the name of Jesus, you can turn right back to the iPod, confident he will pass you by.

If, on the other hand, you're watching *McLintock!*, a revolting 1963 Western comedy in which, for the 85th time in their sorry careers, John Wayne saves his difficult marriage to Maureen O'Hara by taking her over his knee and giving her a good spanking, you will only wish, as I did, that the screen were the size of a subatomic particle. ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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SCROOGE
ENTERPRISES
1 Killmotor Hill
Duckburg, Calisota 15122

Neal Kashkari
U.S. Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20220

November 18, 2008

Neal:

My application for entry into the TARP Capital Purchase Program (CPP) is attached. As we discussed over the phone, declining property values have severely affected Duckburg, and as the town's most prosperous resident and largest employer I feel a responsibility to reinvigorate the local economy. Unfortunately, I am unable to do this because of some bad bets I made in the subprime mortgage industry at the behest of my friends Angelo Mozilo and Gyro Gearloose. The result has been that my net worth has declined from five multiplujillion, nine impossibidillion, seven fantasticatrillion dollars and sixteen cents to a buck eighty.

The lesson of these past few months has been, clearly, that some institutions are too big to fail. My company is no different. The economy has tanked, and life in Duckburg has been changed irrevocably. For example, I can no longer swim in my money bin, and the Billionaires Club has been disbanded. My good-for-nothing nephew is still in the Navy and has not called me in years. I have three hungry mouths to feed at home, and I do not need to tell you that there is no sadder thing to see than the face of a hungry Junior Woodchuck.

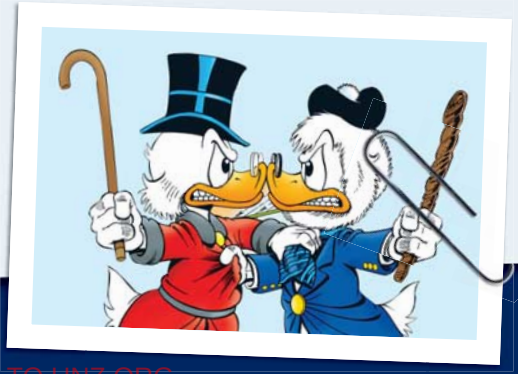
Meanwhile, my dastardly competitor Flintheart Glomgold has suspended his company's dividend. Between you and me, I hear that John D. Rockerduck is looking to sell his shares in Citigroup. And Magica De Spell, despite being on the Terror Watch List, has once again hired those scallywags the Beagle Boys to attempt to steal my Number One Dime. (Little does she know that I have already sold it to the Chinese government in order to finance Duckburg's massive budget deficit.) I've attached photos for reference purposes.

Neal, we all know that I made it by being tougher than the toughies and smarter than the smarties, and that I made it square. But desperate times call for desperate measures. I have already dispatched Launchpad McQuack to meet with Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin in the hopes that he will be able to secure a bridge loan that will pay for my nephews' schooling and my library's janitorial fees.

But why look abroad when aid is here at home? I stand ready to convert Scrooge Enterprises into a bank holding company if that's what it takes but, as you might imagine, I remain inflexible on the issue of executive compensation. The way I see it, it won't be long before you-know-who takes office and then we'll really be in trouble. As a Bush Ranger, I have fought for the free-market system over the last eight years and would hate to see it perish.

See you at squash Tuesday.

Scrooge



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